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MRS. DRUMMOND'S VOCATION

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By

MARK RYCE

NEW YORK
THE VAIL COMPANY
1911

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£1.5.1

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I

Into the brooding heat of an August afternoon, into the hot quiet of a small sun-filled street, rang a peal of young feminine laughter.

It gurgled, it rose, it almost glittered as it soared; it bubbled, and broke, and showered, silvery, into silence.

Madame Coutreau, the green-grocer opposite, who sat sewing in the moist dusk of her little shop, shook her head and smiled as if against her will.

"Pardieu, fruit is dear and customers scarce, to say nothing of Anatole breaking his leg—but when the little one laughs—one laughs with her!"

A ragpicker, a mouldy man with a sour, sunken mouth, held up his head alertly and paused in his task of poking in the foul gutter, as the sound of the laugh reached him.

"Tiens, one would say music," he muttered.

And Samuel Drummond, nonconformist missionary, on his way from Clapham to China, set down his cup of some strange infusion given to him as tea, and looked into the dimness at the back of the café whence the sound came.

The café was a humble one, the street that of Faid'herbe, the town Boulogne.

There were half-a-dozen marble-topped tables and two dozen iron chairs; the wooden floor had recently been sprinkled with water; the walls flared forth advertisements of Amer Picon, Oxygénée Cusenier and other varieties of liquid refreshments. One of these pictures, that of a scantily-clad damsel, drinking a glass of some bubbly yellow fluid, to the excellency of which her ecstatic smile testified, had offended Samuel

Drummond, and his back was turned to it.

At the back of the room was a small bar, behind which, in a high chair, sat an old woman with a scrap of black lace on her white hair, sound asleep.

The knowledge that the patronne dormait was brought home to the solitary customer of that early hour by the frowsy waiter who produced the tea demanded by Drummond as a concession to a sudden feeling of faintness, experienced as he reached the café. The patronne, undisturbed by the advent of the customer, slept on.

The laugh had come into the silence like a peal of bells, or the tossing of a scarlet flower, or a flash of light. It came through a half-opened door to the left of the sleeping old woman.

Drummond made another attempt to drink his tea, which was beyond conception nasty, his eyes fixed on the door.

Then, as the frowsy waiter lounged at one of the two tables that stood on the side-

walk by the entrance, with its dusty sentinel bay-trees, and the patronne slept on undisturbed, the half-open door opened, and a small black poodle minced affectedly out on its hind legs, a wide white hat tied on its head.

Absurdly vain of its unusual headgear, the creature peacocked towards Drummond, its eyes plainly appealing for praise.

The young man watched it gravely. It was extremely funny, but he resented funny things.

The dog approached with a delicacy of equilibrium that would have been noticeable even in a really trained canine performer, and then, his eyes straying from it to the door, Samuel Drummond beheld Lily Crane.

What he saw was a child of seventeen in a faded violet cotton frock that was too tight for the graceful buddings of her figure; round and round her little head her bright hair was bound in the tidy French way, but it broke into curls and tendrils on a brow as white as paper, and delicately blue-

veined. Her eyes were large, and the colour, it seemed to Drummond, of honey in the sun. He did not notice her nose, for her red, thin mouth, dimpled and short-lipped, caught and held his attention—held it till the last hour of his life. Its coral-coloured lips were as smooth as satin and the minute muscles of it looked strong. It seemed to him that she could, if she wished, move it in a million different ways. And the lift of the upper lip as she saw him, and stood still, made his excellent heart turn over in his breast. For a second she hesitated, as if poised for flight, and then, as the poodle reached him and squatted down in consequential expectance of a toothsome reward for his cleverness, her mouth quivered, broadened and opened, and again the clear, delicious, cool laugh rang out into the quiet.

"Viens, Folichon, viens, vilaine bête," she called, as the laugh ended in a little upward gurgle that brought an answering quiver to the Englishman's grim lips, "je ne savais pas . . ."

She looked, as she stood there, dimpling and shy, like the incarnation of lovely things he had never hitherto appreciated. He thought vaguely of spring in the country, of running water, of starlight, of roses. And then the sleeping old woman opened her very black eyes and said something short and sharp in French, a pernicious and immoral tongue of which Drummond was guiltless.

The young girl's face changed suddenly to one of expressionless submission, and she withdrew without looking again at Drummond.

Then the old woman, to his surprise, addressed him in fairly good English.

"She is a child," she said severely, as if the irruption of the child in question had been his fault. "She is only seventeen."

"I think," he answered, "that she did not know anyone was here. The dog came in first. It—it had a hat on."

He blushed at the absurdity of the phrase. He was as serious a young man as any ever

sent by wise men in Clapham to convert the heathen.

The old woman nodded. "It was a—a—what says one?—a shoke. Yes, it was a shoke. She would make to laugh Henri,—the garçon."

As she spoke, she descended from her perch and came from behind the counter; a short old woman, dressed in shabby, very clean black, a scrap of lace fastened under her chin by an amethyst brooch. Time had spread her figure and loosened the flesh of her face, which hung in undulating folds, softly white, but it had not quenched the severity of her black eyes nor the authoritative note in her voice. A maîtresse femme, Madame Louvrier.

"She is your daughter?" suggested the impaled Drummond, one hand to his breast, as if to feel the arrow that had pierced him.

"My granddaughter. Ah, Monsieur,—I can see that Monsieur is serious,—it is difficult to bring up a young thing like that in a café. My clientèle is of the most respect-

able, des hommes rangés, tous, and Henri is a dragon—but yes, a dragon. Also the door is defended to her. Nevaire does she come into the café, and yet—it is not the atmosphere for a young girl."

"No," assented the missionary, fixing a resentful eye on the hussy in the picture.

"And yet the café; it is my life; without it we must die of 'ungaire." The old woman spread out her thin brown hands in a gesture of resignation.

What had led to her outbreak to this strange man is not known. It is certain that to her he seemed a gentleman, too far above her own position to be looked on as a possible help in her troubles. His sober black clothes, his depressed face probably gave her a feeling of confidence.

At all events, when he met her half-way in her mood of expansion, the good woman at his request, sat down and "went back to the beginning."

Drummond would in his present mood have believed whatever fantastic tale she

chose to offer him, but Madame Louvrier was perfectly truthful and her narrative veracious in its slightest detail.

Her only daughter had married an Englishman, a traveller for a "Maison de Whiskey," whom the exigencies of business had brought to the café du Perroquet Bleu.

This man, one Oliver Crane, died when his little daughter was three years old, and then the widow took the wrong road. She was beautiful, ah ça oui, but she was frivolous and vain, and in the end had gone off with a mercier de la rue Victor Hugo, who had, oh horror, already a wife.

She died two years later in Paris, never, in the interim, having seen her little girl who had remained with her grandparents at the Blue Parrot.

"Then my 'usban died and me voilà, a middle-aged widow and the little Lily. God has been good to me, and so far all is well, but oh, Monsieur, to bring up a girl at all one needs the eyes of a lynx, the eyes of a—a—"

"Hawk," suggested Drummond absently.

"Yes, a 'awk. And here in the rue Faid'-herbe, in a café—it is difficult! She is good, the child, as good as brown bread, but she loves to laugh—too much. She begins to look in the glass,—soon she will be a woman and she has no dot, and I am old. God is good."

The evil in the tale had embarrassed, and tied the tongue of Samuel Drummond, but at the mention of God his face cleared as at the name of a familiar friend. He and God thoroughly understood each other!

This he explained to Madame Louvrier and the two simple, rigid natures expanded slightly towards each other.

To them both, God was a monstrous tyrant devoid of all tenderness, yet coldly just. They feared loving Him, but on the other hand, they loved fearing Him.

And the laugh of Lily, ringing in Drummond's memory, brought a look to his face that the old woman's shrewd eyes did not fail to see.

It was five o'clock when he left the café and then he stammered to her not good-bye but au revoir.

II

THERE was a friture for supper that evening in the little room behind the café of the Blue Parrot,—delicate fish like baby soles; there was a ragoût of beef, stewed until it was a delicious parody of game; there was a salad whose bowl had indisputably been rubbed with garlic; there were little square cheeses, condensed cream that melted in the mouth; there was a sweet omelette soaked, alas! in rum; a meal such as Samuel Drummond had never before partaken of.

And there was Lily in her best white frock of coarse nun's veiling trimmed with lumpy bows of cheap ribbon—a garment fit for Venus herself, Drummond would have thought, had the Improper Goddess been a fit inmate for his chaste imagination.

Madame Louvrier, fired with the excitement of the great idea suggested to her by

something in Drummond's face, had assumed a demeanour of the greatest dignity, verging on stiffness. The Anglais was angular and plain and awkward, eh bien oui, mon Dieu, but he was, it was plain to see, amoureux fou of the little one; and something about his clothes, his boots, his hideous silver watch chain gave the old woman a comforting confidence that he was well-to-do.

For the first time Lily was allowed to laugh and chatter in the presence of a man. The laugh that so terrified her austere grandmother was, plainly, a powerful attraction to the Anglais. Therefore, let the child laugh!

Madame Louvrier wore in honour of the occasion a lace collar and a long gold chain from which hung a little gold cross, worn thin with age. This horrible symbol caught the nonconformist's eye as he was eating his second delicately fried fish.

"You are a papist?" he asked, faintly, but with the severity he judged obligatory on him.

"Papist? Mais—what is dat?"

He pointed at the cross as he might have pointed, shrinkingly, at a leper. "Catholic?"

Madame Louvrier reflected for a moment, and then she understood.

"Ah! ça, oui. Ah, yes, I am Catholique, naturally. And you, Monsieur?"

He tried to explain to her what he was, but his voice faltered. His duty was to go at once, and never return.

"Vous n'aimez donc pas la sainte Église? You like not ze Church?"

"It is the Scarlet Woman of Babylon," he returned doggedly, his eyes half closing, "the mother of all evil. I—I had not thought of that."

Lily was giving bits of bread to the obliging Folichon, who sat up like a gentleman beside her. The conversation plainly bored her. At her Drummond gave one glance. He would go as soon as common politeness would allow him.

But Madame Louvrier, her sharp black

eyes half hidden under their wrinkled lids, like those of an ancient crocodile, spoke softly.

"Ah, oui, I understand," she said; "you are of the new religion—vous êtes Calviniste. My daughter's poor 'usband, Mistaire Crane,—he too was of that religion. Very sombre I call it,—sans gaité, not gay like ours, but what will you? He was born to it. And when Lily came, he insist, oh, but furiously, that she too should be Calviniste. It was triste, vous comprenez, for my poor Paul and me, but"—with a shrug—"she was *'is* child, Crane's, and—que voulez vous?"

Of this skilfully delivered speech Drummond gathered only the *main* fact. Lily was a Calvinist. The saving grace of this truth purged from his attentive mind any realisation of the horror of the old woman's attitude towards a lack of gaiety in his religion.

"Oh, then she"—he stammered, in his relief draining his glass, hitherto untouched, of red wine.

"But yes. She is of your religion, poor

cherished one. Lily, Monsieur interests himself," she went on in French, "for your soul."

Lily wiped her fingers, just half swallowed by the poodle, and smiled her dazzling smile across the table.

"Ah, yes?" she asked Drummond, "it interests you, souls?"

The strong wine had warmed the missionary's imagination. "Your soul interests me," he declared, "more than anything else in the world."

For a moment her honey-coloured eyes glowed at him; then they dropped and were hidden.

It was what her grandmother had long called her naughtiest trick. Half unconscious still, it yet, even in her youngest maidenhood, savoured of coquetry. Often had Madame Louvrier hesitated whether to respect the innocent half or chastise the coquettish half of the little by-play, but she had always put off her decision.

And now, as she ate her smoking ragoût,

she rejoiced in her heart. For Drummond actually blushed under the glance Lily gave him.

Madame Louvrier was a thoroughly good woman and a devout Catholic. But she was afraid of and for her granddaughter, and if Heaven and the Blessèd Virgin had sent a heretic husband to the girl, it was indeed a blessing that they had sent him before her possibly innate characteristics had had time to develope.

At the back of the house there was a small square of moth-eaten-looking grass in which grew a bony and nearly leafless tree. There was also a tonnelle on which crept a depressed creeper adorned with half-a-dozen pale mauve flowers. Under this little bower the small party drank its coffee. Drummond, on the understanding that it was strictly a temperance drink, took a small glass of some fiery brown fluid that had the immediate effect of reducing any obstacle suggested to his bliss by his brain, to filmy nonsense to be laughed away.

There was a moon, a remarkably large moon of a deep orange hue. Drummond had never before been in such sympathy with moonlight.

Presently Madame Louvrier rose and went to her place in the café.

"Grand'mère lives in the café," observed Lily, dipping bits of sugar into her coffee and transferring them, dripping wet, to her mouth. "She love it."

"And you?"

"Me? No. It is dull, very dull; I can't do with it." There was a decided cockney inflection to her pretty, broken English; she said "cawn't."

"And what *do* you like?"

"Me? Oh, I like to go to the marché where there are many people, and to Mass on Sundays—"

"To Mass? But you are a Protestant!" At the horror in his voice she looked up.

"Protestant! Yes, my father was, and so am I. But,—I go to Mass always with

grand'mère. Que voulez-vous? It is gay and I like the incense."

"But you are a Protestant," he insisted, gazing at her. And she laughed softly. It sounded like rippling water to him, and her eyes held light as golden as that of the moon.

III

THEY were married three days later by a minister from near Leeds, whom Drummond had met on the beach and accosted as a brother.

Mr. Billings, a worn old man with a large wen on his glossy brow, lived as it were in a cloud of the aroma of peppermint, a remedy supposed to be efficacious against the dyspepsia that for many years had held him in its clutches. He had come abroad for his holiday, but the horrors of France had proved to him such that his courage had failed him here at her very edge, and he was installed in a small hôtel on the quai, where he clung pathetically to a waiter who spoke English, and where the beefsteak was really red inside.

He told his story to Drummond and together they sat on the sands whereon French

ladies, frisky though fat, skipped seawards in short skirts, and dallied with the fringe of the Channel with little shrieks of amused fear.

"I wish I had gone to Hoylake," Mr. Billings declared, "but I have always wished to come abroad, and when my dear wife died, last November, my health broke down, and the doctor said a complete change would do me good. It is a rich connection, ours, and they got up a subscription to give me this 'oliday. I don't know," he concluded with deep gloom, "that they'll like my tarrying *here,* but I reely 'aven't the courage to go on."

"The air is good here," suggested Drummond, consolingly; "it ought to help you."

"The little girls' skirts are so short," pursued Mr. Billings, dusting a peppermint lozenge which had accumulated a coating of fluff in his pocket; "they seem all legs. And the only difference one can perceive between them and the very little boys, is that the girls

have lace edgings to their drawers. One doesn't quite see why."

Drummond did not laugh, because he was not in the least amused. The old minister appeared to him to be as worthy as he, in spite of his peculiarities, undoubtedly was, and the younger man was sorry for him.

"It'll cheer you up to have something to do," he suggested; "you didn't expect a wedding here, did you?"

"No, no, I can't say I did. It's a strange thing to do, to marry a French girl." When he sucked his lozenge he, or it, made a loud noise.

"She isn't French. Her father was an Englishman—name of Crane—she is a Calvinist."

And thus it was arranged.

Lily, one bright morning, became Mrs. Samuel Drummond, and a breakfast was partaken of in the garden behind the café.

By means of laths laid over the seven-foot garden walls, and freshly cut Virginian creepers spread over the laths, a certain

amount of shade was ensured to the company. The breakfast was excellent, and old Mr. Billings at one period was moved to tears by emotions of various sorts.

Madame Louvrier, looking rather handsome in a russet-coloured silk, nodded approvingly when Drummond refused wine.

"You have reason, my friend," she said. "Lily too has never tasted it. We others—we French—it is different, but she is Engleesh and it is better she should drink nothing but water."

Lily's father, Drummond knew, had looked too frequently on spirits when they were golden, and he had already written to his parents at Clapham that his bride was a teetotaller.

Under her filmy veil, Lily's beauty was remarkable. And her shrewd old grandmother saw with satisfaction that the child's eyes were often fixed on Drummond's face.

"He will mould her," Madame Louvrier thought, draining her glass; "thanks to the Blessèd Virgin that he has got her while she

is so young. He is a fine young man, too, with his great nose and his big shoulders. Me, I like a man with a nose."

"Messieurs et Dames,"—the uncle Scipion had risen and struck his glass against a bottle to call the company to order. "Messieurs et Dames."

The uncle Scipion, a brother of the late M. Louvrier, was a small man with a remarkably large, black moustache that lay across his little wizened face like the fire-end of a poker. He was a wine-dealer in the champagne, and, it was rumoured, rich.

He had given Lily five hundred francs for her trousseau, and felt in return entitled to a few words.

The few words lasted twenty-two minutes. Lily yawned, her little pink tongue curling up like a puppy's; Madame Louvrier, her eyes with much politeness fixed on the uncle Scipion's face, mentally reviewed her purchase of the trousseau and rather regretted after all that she had changed her mind about the dark blue travelling dress. "The

red and gold galloon was very chic," she reflected.

A fly objected to the orator's oratory and buzzed rudely round his moist bald head. Henri, the waiter, smartened up for the occasion, shoo'd at the fly with his napkin, and nearly put the uncle Scipion's eye out. Uncle Scipion broke off in his discourse on the perfect joy of married life to call Henri a camel, and the bride's bubbling peal of laughter caused her uncle to do what he, none other, called "cutting his discourse short."

The other toasts were brief and few.

Then Lily was taken away by her grandmother to change her frock, and to say goodbye to her Aunt Voilet, a paralysed sister of her father who had lived in the house ever since she could remember, and her constant intercourse with whom explained the girl's fluent English.

Drummond, a few minutes later, joined his wife—O word of wonder!—by Cousin Voilet's sofa, where the invalid, a sharp-

featured woman with blue-white false teeth that snapped when she talked, lay with plates of food and glasses of wine all about her.

"Good-bye, Miss Crane," Drummond said, gently, wondering how she could live with no air; "I will send you the postal cards."

"Thank you, Mr. Drummond. Kiss me good-bye, Lily."

Lily bent over the sofa. "Have you had enough to eat, Cousin Voilet?"

"I've done very nicely, thank you, my dear."

They kissed and Lily cried a little, which lovely act confirmed Drummond for the hundredth time in his opinion that her character, like her complexion, was flawless.

At the door of the café,—crowded with curious customers,—Madame Louvrier and her granddaughter embraced and parted, while Folichon, appropriately decorated with a white ribbon, begged from table to table and made a beast of himself on bits of sugar dipped into various glasses. This, old Mr.

Billings considered a degrading spectacle.

The carriage, drawn up in splendour in the shade before Madame Coutreau's shop, bore the travellers down the street, and their hands, a little damp, were clasped tenderly.

They took the three o'clock express for Paris, and, spending exactly twenty hours in that perilous capital, made their way southwards and took the boat for China where the miserable heathen were waiting for enlightenment.

IV

On the north coast of China, not very far from Shantung, is situated the Bledsoe Mission.

There is a chapel, beautiful with the beauties of corrugated iron, and half-a-dozen bungalows, each in its little compound. Close to the sea runs the long and filthy street that composes the European city, in which live most of the redeemed brethren.

Higher up the gently sloping hill to the left, lies, a huddle of picturesque wooden and tiled roofs, the Chinese city, wherein no foreign power has jurisdiction, and whither flee all Chinese refugees from the British and German settlements within a hundred miles. Old, old is the Chinese city. Its temple was filled with worshippers long before a certain Man was born at Nazareth; its present-day habits are those described by the earliest

Jesuit missionaries and that cheery old rolling-stone, Marco Polo. Centuries leave here as few marks as do years in European cities; the busy, inscrutable crowds gathered together to barter and sell in the market booths, are dressed precisely as were their ancestors when Harry the Eighth ruled in the little Island considered by some people so important.

Serene, immutable, conservative to the *nth* power, the inhabitants of the Chinese city live their lives, worship their queer gods, squeeze their women's feet, paint their crude pictures, eat their indescribable messes, and die their unemotional deaths, regarding the absurdities of their little band of white neighbours with a scorn too deep for words, probably even with a grim amusement.

And it is these people to help in the conversion of whom Samuel Drummond brought his child-wife that day thirteen years ago.

His bungalow, a small grey cottage with a deep, green-pillared verandah, was fur-

nished according to the taste of its late inhabitants.

There were cane-seated chairs, cheap shiny tables, two looking-glasses, both to be extolled as a remedy for budding vanity, coarse crockery, iron bedsteads, and sheets made of a slippery stuff, the name of which Lily never learned.

"Very nice," declared Samuel the evening of their arrival, as he stood before the green-grey mirror in their bedroom, shaving. "And the sitting-room, especially, is really genteel."

"Yes," assented Lily from the next room where she sat, her knees under her chin in the barrel-like stone bath tub; "the pictures are beautiful."

She was immensely pleased at having a home of her own, and her ignorance of all matters of taste stood her in good stead.

She admired the crude magenta wash on the walls, and the yellow antimacassars that adorned those of the chairs whose backs were not chiefly hole. There was one plush

seated and backed rocking-chair whose splendours were protected by a piece of embroidery representing Miss Muffet sitting on her tuffet, eating her curds and whey. This work of art the Drummonds thoroughly admired.

It was now early in October, and the greatest heat of the summer was over, but they ate their strange little supper to the accompaniment of a buzzing electric fan, and found it none too cool. Their servant, Ah Fee, inherited, like the house, from their predecessors, and a noted convert of the strongest nonconformist convictions, slipped noiselessly in and out through the split bamboo curtains, his beady unwinking eyes fixed on his master.

"I hear very good things about you, Ah Fee," Drummond observed kindly, at length.

"Yessir, me welly good Chlistian. Me love Djlesus-Chlist welly much."

"That's right. I shall expect you to give me your help in bringing other—other Chinese people into the fold."

"Yessir, me help bling—Chinese peoples welly ignolant—poor lost sheep."

Lily watched her husband admiringly. He was so good, so wise, she thought. Unconsciously he had taught her to think this. He was so gentle with her, so kind, so immeasurably dévôt!

Madame Louvrier was right. He had caught the girl young and her mind had already begun to take the stamp of his.

After supper the newcomers, sedately dressed in their best, went out to explore the field of their labours and to pay their respect to the Bradys,—the minister and his wife.

The sea was very quiet, meeting the land, apparently, without a break or a seam, and lying nearly as motionless in the pale afterglow left by the sun behind the low mountains at the horizon.

"It smells very bad, doesn't it?" commented Lily, as they passed a chow-house under the verandah of which squatted half-a-dozen great broad-shouldered coolies,

stripped to the waist, eating their mess of rice with a great noise of chopsticks.

These gentry and others, gazed unmoved at the Europeans; the sight was ridiculous to them, but they were used to it. Lily's fair hair, caught by the light of a lantern, shone in a way offensive to their taste, but they made no remarks. Supper was important, and fantan to come, and the opium pipe. These things were perennial, eternal, but the coming and going of absurd foreigners made no real mark whatever on their great country.

Lily paused to look into the windows of the pawnbroker's shop, and again at the fishmonger's, where by the light of torches, housewives laid in their supplies.

Down by the little pier where once a month one of the smaller boats from Shanghai stopped for water, solemn merchants walked gravely, listening to each other's remarks with that politeness which puts our curt civility to shame.

A woman in a bright magenta jacket and

as bright blue trowsers, dragged along by one arm a deliciously fat baby in a loose garment that displayed most of his smooth body, toasted by the sun to a turn.

"Look, Lily, what a fine boy!" said Drummond. But Lily was busy looking at the mother's blue enamel earrings.

"See her earrings—oh, yes, the baby. I don't like babies," she answered absently.

Drummond stopped short. "Not like babies! Why, Lily!"

She gazed up at him. "Ah,—I have shock you? I am sorry. But, no, I do not like them at all," she insisted gently.

Drummond drew her to him and leaned against a sampan that stood just above the high tide line.

"But, darling," he said, very gently, his stern face softening, "you mustn't say that. Suppose the Lord—sent us one?"

Her vivacious answer was in French, and he asked her to repeat it in English. After a pause she gave him what was obviously a Bowdlerized translation. "I said I hoped

the Lord will *not,* Samuel. That was all."

He was silent, and after a minute they went their way back through the village and up the hill. He was very much in love and wished above all things that his moulding of her might be a painless process. Mould her, of course, he must. That was his first duty, but she was seventeen and he was thirty-two; and he was big and strong and she was little and delicate,—he must not frighten her.

After a bit he asked her if she had as yet made any plans for her garden, and they returned no more to the subject of the hypothetical baby.

The minister and his lady they found at home and frankly awaiting their call.

"I knew you'd come, dear Brother Drummond," Mr. Brady said, by way of greeting.

He was a small, thin man, middle-aged and kind-looking, with missionary stamped all over him.

His wife, who, physically, would have made three of him, had a moist-looking, pink

face and a kind, wavering smile. She had on a loose, grey gown trimmed with black, for which she apologised, explaining that with 'er size, by the time evening came it was *absolutely* necessary to get into something comfortable.

The minister, impeccably black, but for his linen, from head to foot, wore straw Chinese slippers and kept one foot on the rung of a neighbouring chair, as 'is corns were *that* troublesome of late.

Kind, conscientious, self-sacrificing, vulgar people, whose limited vision and lack of imagination allowed them to survey their efforts to Christianize China with comforting optimism.

Mrs. Brady, while the gentlemen discussed the conditions of the community, gave her young friend much good advice. Wing Fook was the man to go to when one's clothes were worn out and needed copying; the man who brought fish on Wednesdays was pretty well to be trusted, but Lily was to beware of him of Fridays.

"And you must get a topee at once, my dear. It's very hot still in the middle of the day, and we can't 'ave you laid up with sunstroke. Whitelow's is the place. You can get everything at Whitelow's, from hats to soap. They 'ave Monkey Brand now, I am glad to say," continued the good lady, "and fairly good bacon. Eggs are the greatest difficulty."

To these domestic details Lily listened with the placidity of the born Housekeeping Failure. It interested her far more to overhear the information Mr. Brady was now giving her husband about the other missionaries.

"The Blands you *will* like; Brother Bland is a most earnest worker in the vineyard,—and Sister Bland is as earnest. Then the Smiths, yes, yes, the Smiths are earnest too, but they are younger," went on the Minister indulgently, "and I fear Sister Smith is not quite so serious-minded as she might be. They have four little ones,—the youngest just four days old."

"I have a letter to Mr. Penguin—"

Mrs. Brady fanned herself vigorously. "Oh, yes, the Penguins. Miss Penguin is an invalid, unfortunately, and will be obliged to go home. *'E* is a good man, a very good man. Ah, yes, one of our most earnest workers."

Lily said that she would be very glad to meet the excellent Penguins.

When the Drummonds left, Mr. and Mrs. Brady went with them to the gate of the compound.

"Now, my dear," Mrs. Brady said to Lily, kissing her kindly, "remember, we are all friends here, and whenever you want any 'elp of any kind, or the loan of anything, I'm always ready!"

Through the starlit darkness, the new labourers in the vineyard went home, arm-in-arm.

V

Days at the Mission were much alike; each was like its predecessor; the months, looked back upon, melted together like the sleepers of a railway track seen from a moving train.

When the fourth anniversary of their arrival came round, Lily Drummond could hardly believe it was really the fourth.

"Are you sure it isn't *three* years, dear?" she asked her husband; and Drummond assured her gravely that he *was* sure.

"The first anniversary was our little dinner party, don't you remember? And the second, Mrs. Brady was so ill,—you were with her all day."

"Oh, yes,—last year, of course, was the riot. I remember now. But it hardly seems possible."

The little missionary lady sat in her

verandah, sewing. She was making a frock for one of the Rescued Orphans, a dull grey garment warranted to last through the stormy infancy of several Orphans.

The years had changed Lily Drummond. She had been, when she came to the Mission, so young, so unformed, that, as was natural, Drummond, himself a strong, patient nature, had impressed her mind as much unconsciously as consciously, with the stamp of his. Too wise in his narrow way to frighten her at first with the work that was very nearly his whole life, he let her gradually accustom herself to the strange mental tone of the little community, and then, little by little she had come to do her share in the great work. She read aloud, at first, to the long-suffering Celestials at the Mission School; then she was promoted to giving a few regular lessons to the half-grown boys who learned so readily all that she told them; and a little later, when Drummond felt that her ignorance in religious matters would no longer put him to shame, her occupation became

that of "telling the story of Jesus to the poor heathen."

To this story the poor heathen listened with an exquisite courtesy that delighted the workers who had hitherto met only with the vulgar rudeness, or at least the vulgar good intent, of the London poor. The poor heathen said little, as is their way, and that little was soothing to the missionaries, some of whom wrote home to the periodicals of their sect, describing in flowery language the beautiful behaviour of the more enlightened of the denizens of the Flowery Kingdom.

It is, of course, as impossible to state what the converted Chinese of the Bledsoe Mission really thought, as it is to declare what the idols in their great temples think, or what the Omnipotent Power overhead thinks of the missionaries' labours and their results. The Omnipotent Power, however, being Justice Personified, some theologians to the contrary notwithstanding, must at least, in judging the men and women of the Bledsoe

Mission, count to their credit their indomitable courage, their sincerity, and their kindness to each other as well as to those to succour whom they had left the millions of suffering poor at home.

The Smiths, the Penguins, the Blackers and the rest indeed laboured in season and out, and labouring out of season on the north coast of China is no joke.

The blazing summer days, hotter than the stay-at-home European can conceive, are trying to the temper as well as to the health. Then there are the rains, when for weeks the earth is a great sponge, and sickness abounds. In the winter the cold is intense; and snow lies round about, crisp and cold and even, like the snow in Good King Wenceslaus. Then for months no steamer comes, the post is brought once a month by a runner (who, judging by the time he takes, does anything but run) from Shantung or Wei-Hai; the little community is as much cut off from the outer world as if it were located on a desert island.

And through these vicissitudes the community went its way, patient and kind, ignorant and vain, a very epitome of the world in miniature, but for a marked lack of enmity and greed that characterized it.

When poor Miss Penguin died, in midwinter, Samuel Drummond, the strongest and most muscular of the missionaries, himself dug her grave, cleaving through three feet of snow and gouging up the frozen earth with a pickaxe until a hole had been made sufficiently large to secure the poor, painted coffin from the wolves. And he and Brother Blacker it was who carried the coffin to its grave on their shoulders.

Mrs. Blacker's baby, on the other hand, was born in July, two years after the arrival of the Drummonds, a humid, hot day when things stuck to one's hands and the Australian butter floated precisely like oil, in its tins.

Mrs. Blacker was desperately ill, and the Mission doctor, himself at death's door with dysentery, could not go to her.

Then, in the hour of need, it was Penguin, long, thin, lath-like in build, given to over-profuse perspiration and constant dyspepsia, who came to the rescue. Mrs. Blacker never forgot the wonderful things he was, by God's grace, enabled to do for her, and the rather gruesome details were considered appropriate subject matter for confidential talks over teacups, until the poor lady died, six years later, from the bite of one of the rare little adders found under the stones of the brook near the gates of the Chinese city.

There are other stories that might be told of the brotherly and sisterly love of these voluntary exiles, stories that redound, all of them, to the eternal credit of their kind.

And the Mission flourished. Year by year the number of converts increased and was duly quoted in the home-sent Reports. The number of backsliders was not recorded, and even among themselves, once one of these sinners was found to have slid beyond recall, he was not often mentioned.

At the end of the Drummonds' second

year, the Blands were obliged to send their two children home. The less said about the scene on the pier when the mother said good-bye to the two little creatures dressed in their best and frightened to death by the strange "friend" who was to look after them, the better. Lily Drummond never forgot it.

The one wedding that took place at the Mission during her first four years there, was more cheerful, though why weddings should be cheerful only God knows. The joy should be celebrated after say, five years, when the celebrants and their friends really know that that particular example of the most rashly entered into of human contracts is going to be that rarest of rare things, a really happy marriage. Another story this, however.

Young Pansy Penguin, a niece of the elderly brother and sister who were the doyens of the Mission, came out to visit her relations, from Penang, where her father had a shop. A ghostly slip of a thing, as yel-

low as ivory, with blue rings round her eyes, and purple lips, a very wreck after three solid years in "the states," as the Malay Federation is there called in glorious disregard of another and greater Federation in the American Continent,—she yet attracted a fat, rosy, peony-like youth on his way to enter a bank in Nagasaki.

Velvety, juicy-looking, pink as a young pig, Mr. James Arthur Skindle saw and loved the diaphanous and malarious Pansy. The wedding took place in the Mission Chapel, decorated with yellow flowers for the occasion, North China at that season being flowery only in yellow shades.

It was a very festive week—that of the wedding—and Lily made for herself a new frock of cotton crêpe, pink in hue (in which, surrounded by the yellow flowers, she had never looked less pretty), and there was, in the adjoining compounds of the Penguins and the Blackers, a meal composed of the combined products of all the Mission ladies' skill.

Mrs. Brady with her own hands made the cake, a fact sufficient in itself to lend distinction to any festivity, and none of the brethren and sisters had ever touched *anything* so delicious as Miss Penguin's roast chickens or Mrs. Blacker's trifle.

The bridegroom being the only stranger, it was much like a large family party with, however, none of the distressing features usual at such gatherings. When the young couple had gone off in the boat, the converts had their share of the fun.

There was a meal for them in the schoolroom, but as the chairs were delightfully inferior in number to the converts, nearly twenty of the latter partook of their food squatting in the national attitude on their haunches in the compound.

What did they think of it, the yellow men and women, as they gravely partook of the horrible food offered to them with equal-to-equal smiles, by the white women? No man knows.

But the party was a great success, and

the hosts were satisfied, whether the guests were or not; and that, everyone knows, is the chief thing.

VI

The Drummonds had no children; and the disappointment was a sore one to Samuel. He would have loved to have a son to bring up as he fancied sons ought to be brought up; he longed for the responsibility of a human soul of his own creation under the Lord.

But none came. Gradually Lily too began to regret the fact, whether on his account alone, or also partly because in the warm family atmosphere of the Mission her woman nature had begun to develope, it would be difficult to say. Before the husband and wife slept, they used to pray, kneeling by their bedside, and one of the prayers was always for the little Drummond who so obstinately refused to appear.

Samuel rejoiced in her change of heart; he rejoiced greatly in his pretty, incapable,

silent little wife; sometimes he asked himself if he did not rejoice too much.

Lily was gentle, thoughtful of his comfort; she adored his wisdom and his strength; his piety was to her a constant source of wonder, but she was, and remained, unlike the other sisters.

Daily, weekly, monthly, year in and year out, she did her duty among the women and children of the converts, and to everyone's surprise she was the quickest of all to pick up a useful vocabulary of disjointed Chinese words of the dialect prevailing in that part of the north. So that she, of all the missionaries except Brother Penguin, could go farthest in a conversation with one of the heathen; but she never learned to hammer her belief into their yellow skulls, and she never learned the pious taking-of-the-Lord's-name-in-familiarity so universal among missionaries.

"I cannot tell them God thinks this or that," she used to protest, "because I don't

know. How can I be sure that God wants Ching's little boy to take cod liver oil?"

Mrs. Brady, more and more given, as she grew older, to the wearing of "something comfortable," summed up Sister Drummond's shortcomings in a few words, one night in bed.

"I know, Joshua," she said to the worthy Brady who was pretending to be asleep, "it's this: the dear child is as good as gold, and as willing as ever she can be, but—she 'asn't got the Vocation."

VII

Of all the other brethren and sisters Mrs. Brady had hitherto had grounds for doubting the Vocation of only one. This was Sister Smith.

Sister Smith, it may be remembered, had been mentioned to the Drummonds on the occasion of their first call on the minister and his wife, as being not *quite* so sure to meet with the newcomers' approval as were happily the dear Sisters Bland, Penguin and the rest.

But Lily had liked Sister Smith. This lady, a short, square-built woman with fierce black eyes and a dimpled chin, had herself begun mission life as a convert. She had never been Chinese, but she had, she said quite openly, been as great a heathen as any yellow woman among 'em.

There had been a time, extending over an

indefinite period, when God had been to her as negligible a quantity as a personage she referred to casually as the Perrime Minister. She had come out to Shanghai to work in one of them big shops on the Bund, but Lor' bless you, she 'adn't stayed there. No. When Smith found 'er she was singing in the Victoria Music 'All in a state of sin.

Smith converted her, married her, and took her with him to Yokohama, whence, after two years' work among the little Japs, they had been sent to the Bledsoe.

Furiously, fanatically religious was Sister Smith now, her zeal among the heathen often leading to her manhandling them. A hot-tempered, impetuous creature, half full of Irish blood, her only serious fault was that she would use the horrors of her own past to illustrate the glories of her present state of grace. Sometimes her stories were not what the brethren and sisters considered elevating. But between Lily Drummond and this successfully snatched brand, a kind of friendship sprang up. Sister

Smith alone, of all the missionaries, possessed a sense of humour, and this, although in spite of her merry laugh, her own had, under Drummond's teaching, remained rather rudimentary, was to Lily a cooling spring.

One evening, when the Drummonds had been married about six months, Drummond came home from the school where he had been expounding to a class of older boys, in words of two syllables, the story of Revelations, and found his wife absent.

It had never happened before and he at once set out in search of her.

She was not at Mrs. Brady's; she was not with Sister Penguin. He was on his way to the Blacker's, when on passing the Smith's bungalow, he heard a sound he had not heard for a much longer time than he had realised —Lily's laugh. It took him back in a flash to the narrow street in Boulogne, to the Café du Perroquet Bleu, to the slavish Folichon. Lily laughing like that, and in the Smiths' bungalow!

Lily told him, when he had summoned her and they were walking homewards, what the story was that had caused her outburst. It was a perfectly harmless story about an upset sampan, and he could find no fault with it. He was a good man and a just one, but he was as prejudiced as many others of the unco' guid. It may have been a kind of jealousy that prompted him to give the order, but, to give him his due, he did not know it. He honestly believed that it was because he did not approve of Sister Smith. The order was that Lily should no more go to the Smiths', that her intercourse with the Irishwoman should cease.

"But, Samuel, her feelings! She will be hurt!"

He reflected; his long upper lip pressed firmly on its fellow.

"You must hurt her as little as possible. Go nowhere for a few weeks,—that will ease it for her. And afterwards,—she will understand."

Poor Sister Smith did understand. Her

fiery black eyes glared just once at her treacherous friend, but Lily's golden-brown ones in return filled with tears, and Sister Smith nodded kindly.

"Never mind, my dear," she managed to say to Lily once, in a shop, "it's *him,* and I know it, and maybe he's right. Only—I'm sorry."

"So am I," said Lily simply, holding out her hand.

And thus ended the Sister Smith episode. With it ended again little Sister Drummond's merry fits of laughter. Once Drummond said to her, almost fretfully, "Why do you never laugh any more?"

"I do laugh, Samuel," she returned, surprised.

"Not as you used to. The last time was at—Sister Smith's that evening."

Her face cleared. "Oh, yes, I remember, —*that* way, you mean. What Grand'mère called my 'crises'! Well, I don't know why, I'm sure. I suppose," she added, sedately, "I'm growing older."

VIII

The blinds of the bungalow were down, the creepers on the green pillars of the damp verandah hung limp in the glaring heat.

It was the 28th day of August and the day of Samuel Drummond's funeral. Up the low hill to the right the little procession had gone an hour before, and now Mr. and Mrs. Brady were bringing back the widow to her empty house.

Mrs. Brady, now vastly fat, and still with her wavering smile, held Mrs. Drummond's hand. Mr. Brady had taken his topee off in the shade of his green-lined umbrella, and was mopping his nearly bald head and face with a not over-fresh handkerchief. It was to the good man a source of fretful annoyance that his fat wife had a trick of keeping cool and dry in the hottest weather, while

he, a mere skeleton of a man, oozed at every pore.

" 'The Lord gave,' " he observed presently, his eye glued on the blue, metallically glinting sea before him,—Mrs. Drummond nodded resignedly—" 'and the Lord hath taken away.' "

"I know, Mr. Brady, but how can I live without him?"

"Don't be wicked, Lily." Mrs. Brady spoke cheerfully, as one speaks to a child whose words must be answered but whose mind has put no question.

"I know, I know, but—oh, Mrs. Brady . . ."

The young woman's sobs shook her shoulders under their ill-fitting covering of cheap black material. Her face was very pale, and her hair was untidy under her topee with its long black veil. The Bradys glanced at each other.

It was painful, but it was proper; it was right that a young woman should thus mourn her husband. They were deeply sorry for

Lily Drummond, but they too entirely approved of her despair to take any vigorous means of checking it. So they talked, as they went up the short path to the bungalow, of Heaven and its joys, and the bliss of Samuel Drummond since the day before yesterday, and she cried on.

Ah Fee, apparently quite unchanged by the years, lifted up the bamboo curtains at the door, for them to enter.

"Missee Dlummond no cly," he said gently. "Master wellee happy allee topside with Djlesus Chlist."

Lily tried to smile, for Samuel had been fond of the man.

Tea stood on a table in the shabby room, and in front of the photograph of him who had just been buried, Ah Fee had put a vase of magenta and yellow asters. It was an inartistic effort, but valuable as a token of love, and again the widow smiled at the Chinaman.

"Thank you, Ah Fee," she said.

Her voice was deeper than it used to be,

and remarkably melodious, with a curious little tremor in its lower tones, and even now,—after many hours of crying, it fell pleasantly on the ear.

"Now sit down, dearie, and drink your tea, like a good girl," Mrs. Brady began, taking off her topee and displaying that most unusual thing, in a woman, an almost bald head. "It'll fix you up all right. Ah Fee, tell the Amah to bring Missee's slippers chop chop."

Mrs. Drummond, with the air of one who is tired out with grief, sank down on the ancient rocking-chair. On the back of it hung a red and blue antimacassar of her own crocheting. The one with little Miss Muffet had long since succumbed to time.

Mrs. Brady pulled the black-headed pins from Mrs. Drummond's topee, took the ugly thing off and smoothed with her fat hand the untidy hair, fairer than it used to be, owing to the bleaching action of the hot sun.

"Now, you're not going to cry any more to-day; it's bad for you, and he'd hate it.

And God is good; you can be pretty sure He knew what He was about when He called Samuel."

Mrs. Drummond blew her nose and nodded. "Of course He did, Mrs. Brady," she returned with a dutiful air that sat oddly on her clean-cut face. "I am not questioning His will, only,—I don't see how I can live without him."

The Creator's name was, in this corner of Cathay, such a familiar household word, His way always such a commonplace matter of discussion, that Lily Drummond in her vagueness ran no risk of having Mrs. Brady think that she meant she could not live without Him.

The old woman poured out the tea, while her husband stood looking down at the photograph of the dead man. It was a fine face —Samuel Drummond's—broad of brow and deep of eye. He had improved in looks under his rigid duty-doing, his mouth had strengthened, his eyes were more finely set than in his youth. He had been a devout,

good man, and nearly a handsome one. There was authority in his look, and the old minister smirked suddenly, as he gazed at the picture of his late lieutenant.

"He was pretty pig-headed, was Sam," he thought, "pretty pig-headed."

The room had changed little in the past years; the matting, although quite new, was of the same kind as the one Lily had found there; and the cheap, plush-covered furniture, bought as a surprise for Lily on her fifth wedding anniversary, was now old. Between the two windows was a row of books, all, judging by their titles, of doctrinal tendencies. In one window stood a basket full of knitting and needlework of different sorts. On the whitewashed walls hung a few pictures, two large crayon drawings, evidently "enlargements," and as evidently Samuel Drummond's father and mother, grim-looking people in their best clothes; the other pictures being a coloured reproduction of "Bubbles" and one of Landseer's enormities.

Mr. and Mrs. Brady appeared quite at home in this dreadful room, but the little widow looked subtly alien to it. Her small face, swollen by tears though it was, was very delicate in outline, and her large dark eyes seemed to have been meant to gaze on better things. But to her it was home, and she loved it, and she was leaving it.

"O Mr. Brady," she exclaimed suddenly, setting down her blue tea-cup with a little crash, "how can I bear to go there! What if I shouldn't like them?"

"My dear child, not like *his* father and mother? Why, Lily, what can you be thinking of?" Mrs. Brady was sincerely scandalised, for her creed of brotherly love extended even unto "in-laws."

Mr. Brady poured his tea into his saucer and sucked it up with a loud noise, as if he had been a duck gobbling weeds.

"She didn't mean it, Bessie," he protested kindly; "she's tired out, that's what's the matter with her."

"I suppose it is, Mrs. Brady," agreed Lily

Drummond eagerly; "it was all so sudden. And they will surely be very kind to me. I wish," she added drearily, "that my hair wasn't curly."

"Why, Lily!"

"Well, I do. He used to say his mother and father didn't approve of it, and when I had my picture taken, I put vaseline on it to smooth it down."

The Bradys did not smile. It seemed to them quite natural that the minister in Clapham should look on curly hair as a snare of the devil. The young woman herself, too, was perfectly serious.

"That was eight years ago," she began presently, as the noiseless Ah Fee removed the tea things. "To think that we have been—I mean were—married eleven years!"

"Yes, my dear," returned the old man kindly, "for eleven years you have worked in God's vineyard. It must console you a good deal to think what a good wife you were to our dear Samuel."

"I did my best," she faltered, "but I am very weak."

"You obeyed 'im, and as he was the stronger vessel, it was right and good in God's eyes. Samuel Drummond died young, but he laid up for himself a great store of good works. Of all our people 'e was the most gifted. God gave him not only great zeal but great skill."

The good man's voice warmed as he went on, the two women listening to him with unquestioning attention.

"When 'e came here, just eleven years ago, there were only thirty-eight Christian Chinamen in the 'ole district, and now look at our schools and our chapels! Verily the Lord hath blessed our work."

"But it was not all Samuel," suggested the widow, with perfunctory politeness. "You yourself, dear Mr. Brady, and all the others,—"

There was nothing consciously tiresome to her in all this talk. She had heard no

other since her husband had brought her to the place; his work had been hers, his interests the only ones she knew.

They sat on and on in the little room, and presently, like a blue ghost in the gloom, Ah Fee stole in, and pulling up the blinds, let in the late afternoon sun. Through the hollyhocks that bloomed close to the windows, descendants of flowers sent to Drummond as seeds, all the way from Clapham, a glimpse of the sea was visible, and behind the mountains on the right, the sun was going down, quite quietly, as if he had not been blazing like a hundred suns all day. In the green hollows of the lower slopes of the mountains, pools of purple mist were gathering, and somewhere behind the bungalow a harsh, jerky bell began to ring. It was the call to chapel, and the Bradys had forgotten that time rolled speedily.

"Goodness me, Joshua, you'll be late! You must hurry," Mrs. Brady exclaimed, tying the narrow black ribbons of her topee under her fat chin. "I'll run in to-night, Lily

dear," she added cheerfully, "and we'll all pray for you, you know."

"Thank you, Mrs. Brady, I—"

But her voice failed her and she turned away. A minute later and she was alone. Alone for the first time in her life, one may say. For from the day when Samuel Drummond married her, she had never spent five consecutive hours away from him. And now he was gone for ever. She sat alone in the dying light, trying, as women have tried before, to realise the meaning of the word "for ever."

"Missee Dlummond no cly," murmured the Chinaman, his queer, tight-buttoned eyes fixed unblinkingly on her. "Master welly happy longside Ledeemer."

IX

It had been so sudden; Samuel had been ill in the spring, and they had talked of going by boat to the big German Naval Station where the good doctors were. Then he had got better and they had given up the expensive journey.

A new school was building, and Drummond had taken great delight in watching its progress. He himself had contributed to its erection more than he could really afford, but giving was blessed in the sight of the Lord.

Mr. Penguin had gone for a holiday and the Blands were in England with their children, now a big boy and girl—it was difficult to realise—of sixteen and fourteen. In consequence of their diminished numbers and the comforting increase of converts, the remaining missionaries had been very busy

all the summer. Samuel Drummond had overworked, no doubt. He had grown thin and pale, and had slept badly, but he had not only never complained, he accepted no sympathy and even his wife was not allowed to talk about his health.

His dying as he did, after a quite commonplace attack of dysentery, seemed now to the widow as an act of not quite perfect fairness. He should have let her know how bad he was.

And then in despair at her blackness of heart, she prayed aloud, in the simple way long since become a part of her life, for forgiveness.

"O God," she said, clasping her hands, "forgive thy servant. I am very bad and ungrateful to think that—" she expressed her contrition in English. She had neither spoken nor heard French for years, for those among whom she had lived looked upon a knowledge of the French tongue as a rather disgraceful thing, not altogether unlinked with the devil.

As she prayed, her eyes fell again on the photograph of Samuel, and she burst into unrestrained sobs.

She was so lonely; so awfully, frighteningly lonely. How could she possibly live without Samuel? He had thought for her, told her what to eat, what time to get up, what time to go to bed. His calm strength had never failed either himself or her. And here she was, she, Lily Drummond, a heart-broken widow, going all the way across Siberia to Europe, alone, to Clapham.

She glanced nervously at the portraits of Samuel's father and mother on the walls. Suppose they did not like her?

The fear had always haunted her, even in *his* lifetime, and now it grew to nightmare proportions.

Mrs. Blacker, whose hourly expectation of a tardy baby had dispensed from the evening prayer-meeting, found the widow on her knees by the photograph, and raised her gently to her feet.

"You mustn't take on so, Sister Drummond," she said; "you really mustn't."

"O Sister Blacker, I am so lonely, and I wasn't *meant* to be alone!"

"This trial just proves that God thinks you are," reproved the elder woman a little severely. "Do not rebel. Think how it would displease *him*."

"It was so sudden,—just think, Sister Blacker, only the day before yesterday at this time he was with me. I had just given him his gruel. His last cup!"

Again she cried helplessly.

The two women sat together for a long time and then Sister Blacker called Ah Fee, and went home, knowing that the dear Bradys were coming back after chapel.

The dear Bradys came, and partook heartily of the supper at which Lily could not even look.

They were fatherly and motherly and kind in every way, and they quieted the poor little thing, and finally left her in her bed, sound asleep.

X

The last day came; a cloudy day in September; and all Mrs. Drummond's "things" were packed and ready for the coolies to carry to the boat.

She was to go about a hundred and fifty miles up the coast to a place where she could get the Peking train, and then on to make connection with the Trans-Siberian Express at Harbin.

Her horror of the journey was greatly mitigated by a piece of news brought a few days before by good Mrs. Brady, bursting in breathless at breakfast time, still attired in the "something comfortable" that she now wore habitually in the early mornings as well as the late afternoons.

"My dear! O Sister Drummond, God is good. His goodness indeed passes our 'umble understandings." She panted,

snatching up an ancient palm-leaf fan and using it violently as she sank into the rocking-chair.

Lily, who was seated at the table, writing labels for her boxes, looked up in surprise.

"What has happened?"

Mrs. Brady drew a letter from her pocket. "You've 'eard me speak of my cousin, Sarah Pinker? 'Er that's been so blessed in her work in Shan-hai-kwan?"

"Yes."

"Well, she's got leave of absence for a year, and is going 'ome in the same train with you! I knew she had applied for leave and I wrote to her over a fortnight ago, but I didn't mention it to you for fear you'd be disappointed in case she couldn't get off so soon. But now it's *sure*. She's delighted, and will meet you at Ching-tze-Kao."

Mrs. Drummond clasped her hands in mechanical reverence. "Thank God," she said, meaning it deeply.

"Yes, He is indeed good. You'll like Sarah. She's a little masterful—those big-

nosed women always are—but she's a 'eart of gold, a real 'eart of gold, I always say. And she's an old traveller, too, and will take care of you. Not," the good woman added hastily, "that there's any need of *that,* with God's goodness to protect you."

The boat sailed at noon.

All the morning the little bungalow was filled with friends, come to say good-bye; some of the sisters wept, most of them brought little presents. Sister Smith, who for years had not set foot in the Drummond's house, had brought a white crêpe shawl on which were embroidered flying cranes.

"Elwood gave it to me," she explained, her black eyes wet, "so you can *take* it all right."

Elwood was Brother Smith.

Mrs. Blacker, for the best of reasons—there were two of them, both boys—was unable to be present, but she had sent her eldest girl with a jar of *real* marmalade, and many messages.

The little drawing-room, denuded of the simple and for the most part hideous orna-

ments accumulated by the Drummonds since their arrival at the mission, looked bare, only the skeleton—so to speak—of the defunct home remaining.

Ah Fee, as has been said, still button-eyed and wrinkleless, not a day older than he had been on that August evening eleven years ago, even his pigtail, owing to a discreet use of false hair, as fat and glossy as of yore, hovered round the door.

He was welly solly Missee Dlummond going; welly solly Master makee die; but he was a philosopher, and the new Master and Missee would be coming by the next big steamer to Shanghai, and they too would admire and cherish him.

At last the time had come; the coolies had trotted down the slope, the boxes swinging on their bamboo carrying poles; the last kisses had been exchanged; Mrs. Drummond's Clapham address written down half-a-dozen times; her promise given to call on Mr. Smith's sister in Shepherd's Bush, and not to forget to send the box as soon as ever

she could to Brother Blacker's mother in Hammersmith.

Remember, it was her home she was leaving, and that she had lived there for eleven years.

In her own eyes, Lily Drummond was a middle-aged woman with a broken life.

She shook hands with Ah Fee, she looked once more round the room, and then, throwing her arms round Mrs. Brady's neck, gave a loud sob and literally ran out of the house into the sunlight.

XI

THE train came slowly into the station of Ching-tze-Kao, and stopped with a snort. That is to say, the locomotive drew up opposite the tumble-down building that apparently composed the whole of the town, leaving most of the carriages far down the platform in the pelting rain.

The platform, too, did not deserve the name, for it was, as far as could be seen in the grey dawn, a vast mud-puddle between two stone copings, down which copings the passengers hurried under red or yellow oiled paper umbrellas. There was in all the crowd but one European umbrella, for the train was a local one. The European one, very large, not of silk, was carried by a woman, a woman whose skirts were lifted just too little to be free from the mud, just too much to be altogether proper. She had small thin

feet in buttoned boots and gleaming overshoes. The hand that held up the skirt also carried a large, shabby valise, with S. D. painted distinctly on its outside cover.

Mrs. Samuel Drummond was on her way to England viâ Siberia.

It was the fifth day since she had left her home, and three of the five nights she had passed sitting bolt upright in a crowded second-class compartment; connections had been missed, a bridge had been carried away by a flood, and a squabble between some Chinese and Japanese labourers on the line, to quiet which troops had been sent out, had lost another day.

Lily Drummond was very tired and very wretched, and if it had not been too wicked she would have wished that she was dead. She was also very hungry, for since the preceding noon she had had no food; but as she plodded along in the rain amongst the crowds of Chinese and Japanese, she drew a deep sigh of relief, for here, at Ching-tze-Kao, Mrs. Pinker was to join her.

Sarah Pinker would take care of her; Sarah Pinker would see that she had food; Sarah Pinker would take charge of her troublesome and for-ever-getting-lost ticket.

For Mrs. Drummond was a very bad traveller, and her utter dependence on her husband had made of her a creature nearly as helpless as a child. She was not timid, but her powers of fending for herself had never grown.

"Only two hours more," she said to herself, folding her umbrella, as she came under the leaky roof of the station.

Then, in passable Chinese, she asked a respectable-looking old Chinaman in a blue silk garment and a sailor hat tied under his chin with narrow black ribbons, where the restaurant was.

The restaurant, she learned, had been burnt down the preceding week, but in the meantime food was to be had there, at that door on her right.

The room she entered was not a cheerful one.

The low roof was still lighted with foul-smelling lamps, for it was a dull day; the floor of earth beaten hard, but full of hollows, was wet, for the roof was leaking with a cheerless, splashing noise.

On one side was a dirty, gaudy-looking refreshment bar, on the other the luggage-registering place, where three coolies were sleeping. It was all very sordid and horrid.

Sarah Pinker, however, would soon be there.

They brought her very good tea in a glass, and two very bad eggs which they removed, when she timidly protested, with an unwilling air that almost frightened her.

Presently, her hunger overcoming her fears, she bought a packet of chocolate and sat down again, waiting for Mrs. Pinker, whose coming should change all things.

People came in and out, clamouring for food and drink, chiefly drink; it was awful to see the men pour the fiery vodka down their throats. Mrs. Drummond did not

know from experience that vodka was fiery, but it was one of the ready-made terms that are part of the lives of such as her husband had been—"Enervating wine," "degrading opium," "maddening whisky."

Another train came in, the sleeping coolies waked up, and with an indescribable din the travellers got their luggage rebooked. Then the train left, and Mrs. Drummond was alone in the restaurant, save for two German tourists who smoked bad cigars and talked about Family Affection in loud, angry voices.

At last she fell asleep in her corner, and when she woke up, it was to find the restaurateur, a handsome, villainous-looking Russian, holding a telegram to her and evidently asking if it was for her. It was. "Mrs. Drummond, Station Restaurant, Ching-tze-Kao," and before she opened it she knew what it contained.

"Minister typhoid journey postponed indefinitely writing Grand Hotel Harbin Sarah Pinker."

The young woman's eyes filled with tears. Siberia appeared to her like a world traversed by a single line of railway. The rest of her life would surely be passed in travelling that waste; she must go on and on, forever, and alone. What a fool she had been to start, to trust to that unknown Sarah Pinker, who failed people.

Then, ashamed of the thought, she tried to pray for guidance and courage. She was accustomed to pray in a practical way and was not ashamed to ask God to let her find some other woman going to England, that she might be looked after.

At last, feeling somewhat cheered, she had more tea, and, taking pen and paper from her bag, wrote a long letter to Mrs. Brady, in which she spoke more kindly of Mrs. Pinker than she could, even after prayer, quite feel.

This lack of accord between her mind and her emotions had always troubled her; her husband had talked to her about it, and she knew when she said, "Poor Mrs. Pinker!

I am so sorry for her!" she ought not, as a good Christian, to feel at the same moment how inconsiderate it was of Mrs. Pinker's minister to fall ill just at this time. But she did resent the minster's lack of consideration in a very wicked way, and she was ashamed.

The day was long, for the train did not leave until six o'clock, and it did not stop raining until after four. When it did cease, the curiously over-hanging sky broke into rosy crevasses of light.

Mrs. Drummond, lifting up her skirts to the top of her boots, and pinning them with a safety pin, went for a walk.

A pathetic little figure she looked in the vast plain of purple-gleaming mud, as she walked on into the sunset.

There was nothing to see; the only houses were of mud, the only trees a few shabby willows; but the air felt fresh and cool. Her crêpe veil had got wet several times since she left home, and hung limply round her white face. Her hair curled in tendrils,

more pronounced than usual in the dampness, and she looked vaguely like a nun of some kind, with her white collar and absorbed air.

When she had walked for half-an-hour the rain suddenly came down as if the sky had opened, and there was nothing for it but to splash back to the station as fast as she could.

Covered with mud, she sat down disconsolately, and the restaurateur came and rubbed her down with a friendly, but very dirty, towel.

At six the train bore her away, appalled by her own helplessness and loneliness, and ashamed of her lack of faith.

XII

THERE was no sleep for Lily Drummond that night, for two reasons. In the first place, a Manchu woman's baby cried most of the night from earache: in the second place, a vision of the house for which she was bound haunted her ceaselessly.

She hated herself for her fears, but they were very deep-seated.

Years ago, her husband had talked of taking her to see his people on one of his rare holidays, but she dreaded the journey, she said, and they went to Korea instead. In reality it had been more the old people than the journey she dreaded; she knew all about them from her husband, the fine, unbending quality of the old man, the stern righteousness of the old woman.

She knew that they lived in a small house in Clapham, near the Common; that Mr.

Drummond's chapel was filled with the most zealous of brethren; that his sermons were marvels of scriptural power. His chief talent lay, she was aware, in the valuable line of presenting to his hearers the most blood-curdling pictures of hell; and Samuel Drummond, his face lit with admiration, had once said to her that it was a difficult thing to describe the same thing hundreds of times and never grow monotonous. She was convinced that there could be nothing more splendid for an able-bodied old man, than to devote the greater part of his time to describing the terrors of the next world.

She appreciated the abstemiousness of the minister and his wife, their pinching and saving for the poor heathen of foreign lands, their sacrificial joy in giving their only son to the great Cause.

She knew that his mother's only jewel was a cameo brooch of a tombstone, over which hung a weeping willow; that his father prayed aloud every morning for twenty minutes. All these things the young

wife knew, and yet, she told herself over and over again, really distressed by her own wickedness, she did not wish to go and live with these remarkable and admirable people. She had never wished to go, even when Samuel's wing was spread over her in shelter; and now, as the train bore her on towards them, a positive terror of them overcame her.

"I am so silly," she repeated to herself over and over again, "so silly."

Meantime, the Manchu woman, with the magenta rouge on her face, as is the fashion with virtuous wives in that country, watched the strange, white woman with the ridiculous curly hair and the white face, and thanked some favourite god of her own that she was not as the other.

And this is Life, too.

Slowly the night wore away, lighted only by the feeble flicker of an occasionally renewed candle in a glass cage in one corner of the carriage.

Mrs. Drummond dropped to sleep from

time to time, only to wake with a start, stiff and chilly.

The child wailed; two Japanese officers in ugly khaki uniform made tea and drank it out of little handleless cups, in perfect silence.

The candle went out and, after an interval of utter darkness, during which Lily Drummond shivered with nervous terror, was replaced by another whose light seemed, by force of contrast, almost unbearably bright.

Tears stood in Mrs. Drummond's eyes. That she, of all women, should be starting to cross Siberia all alone, seemed a cruel jest of Fate. She was frightened, she wanted her husband. Oh, how she wanted his arm to tuck her hand in, to lean upon.

In all the beautiful quiet years, she had never once been lonely. Oh, how ungrateful she had been to feel sometimes that the quiet had been too great! What would she not give to have it back!

But now, here she was, a heart-broken

widow, going all the way across Siberia, alone. And her bonnet and veil were irretrievably ruined, and she must get new ones in Harbin, thus spending at least twelve dollars Chinese. How disappointed Mrs. Brady would be if she knew. Mrs. Blacker, and even Mrs. Smith would have known how not to spoil their new things. Only she, Lily, did not know.

"I am so silly," she thought again.

She ate chocolate at intervals, and prayed.

At two o'clock she had to change trains, and was put into a compartment where two European women were comfortably lying down, smoking cigarettes. Apologising for disturbing them, she settled herself and decided to try and sleep.

But the two women were talkative; they spoke French, which was evidently not the mother tongue of the younger one.

Mrs. Drummond listened idly. It was strange and rather pleasant, hearing the pretty, soft syllables again, after so long;

and the elder woman's voice was delightful.

"Of course my clothes are in rags," she was saying. "Figure to yourself, my dear, fourteen months in the East! Old as I am, I long to see my dressmaker."

"Silk splits so horribly in the dampness," returned the other, "and as to *gloves,* my maid is in despair. When I think of stopping to see the Karmanoffs, I really almost despair myself." The elder woman laughed. "And Vera Karmanoff, with all her clothes from Callot."

There was a short silence, and the younger one went on, with sudden decision.

"I shall wire to Paris, have some things rushed through, and sent to Moscow. I really haven't the courage to face the Karmanoffs in shabby or badly-made clothes. I really haven't!"

"Quite right, ma chère," returned her friend, lighting a fresh cigarette, the little flame showing up her strong, clever face. "I, who am old, lose all my courage if my

gown doesn't fit. Good clothes are a woman's armour, I always think." Pausing, she glanced at Lily, whose eyes were shut, and then added in an undertone: "Think of starting for Europe in that frock! Poor little thing, really quite pretty too."

In the faint light Mrs. Drummond's face flushed slowly. No one had called her pretty since she had left her grandmother's house—not even Samuel—and somehow she liked it. As to her poor frock and bonnet, vaguely she wondered if the Frenchwoman were right, if she would feel braver if her clothes were more stylish. That is the word she used in her mind—"stylish." But, oh, how frivolous she was to think of such a thing. If Samuel knew, up there with God, how shocked he would be. Mechanically she said a few words of prayer, and, the two women ceasing their talk, she shortly afterwards fell asleep.

And this is what she dreamed—the little missionary from China.

She saw herself in a motor, as she had oc-

casionally seen motors in pictures, for a real one she had never beheld. And she wore a most beautiful white ball-gown, sparkling with specks of silver; and on her head was a diamond crown. The carriage rugs were all of sable, which to her ignorant imagination was a quite black fur, and over her white gown she wore a loose wrap of crimson satin, embroidered Chinese-fashion, with gold dragons and preposterous blue flowers.

Thus attired, she was travelling across Siberia, and she was joyously, triumphantly unafraid. It was this sentiment of paramount courage that was the chief feature of the dream; she had, since leaving the quiet corner of the earth that had been her home, been so troubled and wearied by her own incapacity, half-starved, half-thirsting to death, through the fault of her own helpless lack of foresight, that the feeling of royal ease was quite marvellous. The country was bare and cold as they went along, but

she—Lily Drummond—was happy and unafraid.

It was a curious dream, but when she awoke with a start at Harbin, her cheeks were still flushed with triumph.

It was very disillusioning to get out into the pouring rain, to struggle for her luggage, to hail a droschky and sit down in its mud and filth. Oh, if the dream were only true!

Rattling across the villainously paved square to the hotel, a feeling of sick disgust came over her. What a coward she was, and how distressed Samuel would be if he knew.

XIII

THE luxurious liver is not advised by the present writer to go to Harbin.

The town is filthy, ugly and depressing, and much the same may be said of the hotels. Mrs. Drummond's hotel presented to her that rainy morning a sad aspect. The endless flights of iron stairs were covered with an extremely dirty and ragged drugget, the air was foul, and the servants, good-natured and willing, understood not a word of anything but Russian, and were maddeningly dull at understanding signs. She was shown into a small room furnished with the commonest of bedroom necessities; the bare floor was dirty, the tiny electric bulb hung about one inch from a very high ceiling, and there were neither bed-clothes nor towels to be seen. The walls were painted, in stripes of various widths, with bright colours which

might possibly have pleased the more youthful inmates of a home for weak-minded children.

It was a dreadful place, and even Lily Drummond, used as she was to the tasteless simplicity of the missionaries, was depressed by it. Her train left that evening at nine, so a long day was before her, and sitting down she tried to plan how to spend it to the best advantage.

She took off her ruined bonnet and unpinned her hair, which was a relief. Should she go out at once and buy the so sadly necessary new things and rest afterwards, or would it be better to rest first? She was desperately tired, and, catching sight of her weary face in the glass, decided suddenly to have a bath and go to sleep before she did anything else.

Ringing, she signified that she wished a bath. The maid, a strapping wench in grey canvas shoes with preposterously high heels, brought her, with every appearance of good-will, a carafe of drinking water. A

second attempt produced pen and ink, and after being offered an extra table and a blue sateen pillow, she gave up and went downstairs in search of help, putting on her bonnet to hide the disorder of her hair.

Finding a pallid youth playing a piano in a passage, she addressed him, and to her glad surprise, he answered her in American.

"Yes, she might have a bath, some tea and some boiled eggs. Bath extra, towels extra, and the food must be paid for at once."

It embarrassed Mrs. Drummond to talk about baths with a young man, but he did not seem to mind, and calling down the giggling maid, whose heels threatened to precipitate her prematurely into another world, he gave her countless orders in Russian.

As Lily listened to these orders, a tall man in uniform clanked down the passage, and the pallid youth and the maid leaped, obsequiously, out of his way. With the uninterested glance of a man for a plain, badly-dressed woman, he passed, and Mrs. Drummond almost gasped, as he went down

the stairs. He was, she thought, the most beautiful creature she had ever seen.

As a matter of fact, Serge Troumetskoi was a big, handsome, somewhat animal-looking man of five-and-thirty. His was the beauty of feature seen so often among Russian men, coupled with a radiance of health and good fortune, quite remarkable. His eyes, startlingly blue in his sunburned face, were shaded by long, coarse, black lashes, and under his short moustache his finely-cut, satiny red lips wore an expression of intelligent self-satisfaction and cynical good-nature.

He had not noticed Mrs. Drummond, beyond thinking, "What a get-up!" but she did not forget him, nor the conquering swing of his great shoulders. She knew that love of beauty is not a quality that pleases God; she knew that Samuel had always said, of how trifling an importance looks are, compared to those treasures of the soul—humility, generosity, self-sacrifice. But, at the same time, the beauty of Serge Troumetskoi and

his quality of mellow humanity worked potently in her mind.

When, at about three o'clock, she woke up, she rose greatly refreshed, and by four o'clock she was seated in a droschky, being driven to the big German shop where she was told she could buy anything.

The rain had ceased, but the villainous streets were more like rivers than thoroughfares. The low carriage jolted along in a perfect shower of mud, the velvet-coated driver yelling and beating his beasts unceasingly.

The street was thronged with people of all nations, all wearing either top boots or huge rubber overshoes, and the poverty-stricken Celestials recalled to Mrs. Drummond's mind the Chinamen, the dear, good, Christian Chinese at the Mission. The big men of the North are very different from those of Harbin, where, in fact everyone except the casual tourist appears to have been chosen as a representative type of the rascality of his nation.

The droschky stopped in front of a big shop, and she went in. A young man who spoke English conducted her to the millinery department, and she beheld, it seemed to her, the most marvellous mourning bonnets in the world. They were, however, appallingly dear. Samuel would be shocked if he knew. She hoped he did not know.

Taking off her own bonnet, she tried the new ones on, slowly, carefully, enjoying it very much. Her face was flushed, her hands shook a little, timidly she loosened her hair over her ears. No, that bonnet was too large. As she laid it down, a clanking sound caught her ear, and, turning nervously, she saw the big officer of the morning, accompanied by another man.

As he passed, he glanced at her, she saw in the glass to which she quickly returned.

"Look what pretty hair," he said in French to his companion, his eyes fixed on her in the mirror, with bold admiration. Then he was gone and Lily sank into a chair. "Pretty hair!" And those two ladies in the

train had said she was pretty. Oh, well,—going back to one of the bonnets which she had rejected as too dear, she put it on. It was small and of the shape known once upon a time as "Mary Queen of Scots"; that is to say, it came in a point low down upon her brow, and in it was a ruche of soft white crêpe.

"I'll take this one," she said suddenly, in a rather loud voice. "I'll wear it, and you may send the other to the hotel." Then she added: "Will you tell me where I can get a dress, ready made, and a jacket?"

If Samuel was astonished by this remarkable proceeding, it is safe to say that that excellent shade was no more astonished than his relict, when she found a young woman with a necklace of pearls as big as hothouse grapes, squeezing her into a very tight black gown, of a material soft and clinging, that she had never before seen. The dress was not so marvellously beautiful as Mrs. Drummond thought, but it had one advantage; it was so cut that it displayed to the greatest

effect the supple curves of her long, pretty figure.

"I—my stays are very tight," she said with a smile.

"O madame," protested the girl, whose own waist was half the size of her patron's, and Mrs. Drummond blushed for her own ignorance.

A very loose, black coat, lined with squirrel, or some animal excellently disguised as such, completed her purchases, and after paying the terrifying bill with tight-set lips, she swept out of the shop, unrecognised by the young man who had received her on her entrance.

The sun had come out, the rivers and lakes in the streets were gleaming with gold; the sky, piled with glistening white clouds, was a brilliant blue.

Lily Drummond sang to herself, as she held her skirts out of the filthy straw at the bottom of the droschky:

"'O Jesus, thou our help,
O Jesus, thou our friend.'"

The words were of the friendly banality dear to Mr. Brady, but the music was not the old hymn tune. The music was new and worldly, and bubbled up warm, from the young woman's flattered vanity.

"I am pretty," she said under her breath, "and I'm glad; I don't believe it's wicked to be pretty; I believe that Samuel was mistaken."

This was the rankest heresy to which her soul had ever given birth. Samuel mistaken!

But in her room her spirits fell, as any spirits would have done in that depressing apartment; so she wept a little and prayed a little. Fortified by supper, she cheered up, and the new clothes again appeared to her to contain elements of joy and strength.

When Mrs. Pinker's letter arrived, containing that lady's ticket to be exchanged if possible, she was able to write a very pleasant answer to it, regretting that it was too late to take any steps about the ticket, and hoping that the minister would soon recover.

Under the influence of the new clothes, the minister's behaviour in falling ill with typhoid looked to her far less reprehensible than it had done from under the shadow of the bedraggled veil.

The moon came up clearly, bringing with it a cold, biting wind. Mrs. Drummond reached the station an hour too soon for her train, and as soon as she was allowed to go through to the platform, did so. Her compartment, which, through Mrs. Pinker's defection she was to have to herself, looked palatial to her, and the respectful manner of the guard was like balm.

"That old lady was right," she thought; "it's the clothes."

For she felt very grand indeed. Too restless to sit down, she went out again and began walking up and down the long platform.

Ten minutes before the train started, a tall man in a fur-collared coat and grey clothes, came across the line, and, while his servant went on ahead with his luggage, paused and lit a cigarette. It was the big

officer en civil, and he was going in the train.

Throwing away his match, he caught sight of her, and with a twist of his moustache, stared. It was, she saw, a new stare; he had not recognised her.

His first glance that morning in the hotel had been merely indifferent. The look in the shop had been one of condescending admiration of her curly hair.

This stare, she knew, was quite different. It meant admiration of her as a pretty and well-dressed woman.

She walked on quietly, flushing but unoffended, where a more experienced woman would have been angry, or a finer-fibred one, insulted. Truth compels the statement that the little missionary was pleased and flattered at the tribute, and Serge Troumetskoi for his part, raised his eyebrows and said something in Russian which means "À la bonne heure."

XIV

In order fully to appreciate this instructive tale, the reader is begged to realise that even to an old and luxurious traveller the Trans-Siberian International Express is in some ways a revelation of comfort. That is, the carriages are new and clean; there is more overhead room for luggage than in any other train in the world; the beds are wide and comfortable, and the service excellent.

It will therefore be seen that Lily Drummond, installed in a first class compartment, found herself in Paradise. She came from the plainest kind of a home; since leaving that home, she had been subjected to the unbelievable discomfort of travelling in the Far East; she had been half starved for days. Add to these things that she had by chance never in her life even *seen* a sleeping

carriage, and you will be able, more or less accurately, to gauge her feelings. To her, the art nouveau decorations were beautiful; the crooked panelling and the grotesque stained glass, marvels of artistic expression, and the very bed on which she slept, a mystery, almost a poem, in its complicated arrangements.

Before she got into bed, she stood for a long time in front of the glass in the door, looking at herself, tall and slim in her thick white nightgown. Her curly hair, well brushed and plaited in two tails, her small face bore something of the look of a tired child's. But what so interested her was the marvellous new fact that she was pretty. As if with strange eyes, she gazed at herself, and, after a long pause, she said aloud: "Yes, it is true."

The comfortable train forged ahead, easy on its strong springs, and in her bed, Mrs. Drummond, having knelt by it to pray, fell asleep, her mind filled for the first time in her life by thoughts of her physical self.

The next morning she woke up to find the conductor standing by her, smiling pleasantly.

"The breakfast is over," he said in French. "Si madame veut son café au lit . . .?"

Lily drew the sheet up close under her chin. No white man but Samuel had ever seen her in bed, and she was ashamed. But the conductor's respectful friendliness reassured her, and she drank her coffee and ate her bread and butter with a good appetite.

An hour later she went into the corridor and sat down on a little folding seat while her bed was being made.

It was a fine, clear day and the ugly Manchurian landscape was pleasant to look upon. The sky was blue and the few trees clean from recent rain. The rapid movement of the train exhilarated the young woman, who happened to be a born traveller, though she had hitherto had no means of discovering the fact, and the world looked to her, as she sped through it, a goodly heritage indeed.

In this beautiful train she was no longer so afraid as she had been; she was not hungry, and she was wearing the new frock.

Presently a little girl with very bony knees and an absurdly short skirt, came and talked to her.

"What's your name?" asked the child, shortly, with a twang. "Mine is Lucile Hélène Butts, and I am eight."

"Mine is Lily Drummond, and I am twenty-eight."

"My mommer's name is Clara, and she is thirty. Have you any little girls?"

"No." Lily spoke unregretfully.

"You must be very lonely. Are you all alone? Do you do your hair up in pins?" pursued the child, her sharp eyes darting suspiciously at Lily's hair.

"No, it grows that way."

"Oh! Have you got a gold watch?"

"No. What an inquisitive little girl you are!" Mrs. Drummond was gently bored, although she had never used the word in her life.

"Intelligent children always ask questions," returned Miss Butts glibly; "Momma says so."

Just then the tall man in grey came out of his compartment, which Lily saw was next hers. He wore a peculiarly fresh aspect and held up his head like a conqueror of worlds. But it was not a conquering spirit that caused that uplift of his chin. It was the consciousness that no matter how much he chose to drink over-night, he could feel and look quite fit the next morning. The cleft in his big chin caught Lily's eye as he passed. A moment later she sat again in her compartment. She heard his voice, a deep smooth voice, with a note of command in it, softened by his un-English accent.

"How old are you, Miss Lacy-Skirts?" he asked banteringly.

And Miss Butts's shrill pipe gave instant answer.

"And is this pretty lady your sister?"

It was, he knew, a banal method of ap-

proach, but apparently it would, in the present case, suffice.

It did. Blushing to her ears, Mrs. Drummond withdrew to the farthest corner of her seat and leaned against the window.

"Oh, no," Miss Lacy-Skirts returned with a giggle; "I haven't any sisters; I am an only child. That girl is—I don't know—Lily something, she said. I suppose she's in mourning. I wonder who's dead."

"Hush!"

Lily was grateful to him for the word, but she was glad when he stopped speaking. Her head was hot and she felt vaguely upset.

Taking a book from her bag, she began to read. But the book was dull and failed to hold her unstable attention. It was so queer that he should be there, in the compartment next hers, and he was so handsome. Samuel had been handsome, too, but somehow *his* face did not make one feel as this man's did.

She wondered in absolute ignorance, what

the difference was, and at lunch time, when she found herself given a corner table and that the big man was just behind her, she deliberately turned her back to him and sat facing the wall. But she had reckoned without the mirror, which often happens in this world, a fact on which volumes might be written.

In the mirror the big man's blue eyes were fixed steadily on hers. It was very confusing. The food seemed strangely elaborate to her and the haughty waiter showed disapproval as she said she did not want any wine.

Now, Mrs. Drummond, though confused by the newness of things, was not naturally timid, and five minutes had not passed before her calmness had returned, and while many women would have been annoyed or even frightened by the bold homage in the man's gaze, she was, after the first minute, only puzzled. It pleased her to be stared at, and she wondered if it was wrong for her to be pleased. She had, remember, never heard other women tell their experiences;

she had never heard any man resent his women-folk being stared at, for the women-kind among whom her lot had been cast were not of those who attract marauding glances, and her old grandmother had lived, in spite of the exigencies of the café, in almost cloistral solitude, keeping the child with her every moment, and guarding her with affectionate care, but at the same time watching her with the hawk's eyes of one who knows.

Her only books had been those in the Bibliothèque Rose, and after her marriage, half-a-dozen of Walter Scott's novels, Mrs. Hemans' delicious poems, and semi—or altogether religious works.

An imaginative person observing her in the wagon-lit that day in Manchuria would, if aware of those few fundamental facts, have thought—"Marguerite, despite her twenty-odd years, and the Devil seeking amusement for himself." But the imaginative person would have been, as imaginative persons so often are, quite wrong.

Serge Troumetskoi was bored to death, and Lily, to his eyes, distinctly alluring. The back of her neck, between the black of her dress and her hair, was marvellously white. The line from her hip to her knee was, too, he had seen, very fine; and Moscow was ten days away.

So all through luncheon she felt his eyes were on her in the glass, and when, once in a while, she raised her own eyes, a queer little tremor went over her.

But when she went back to her compartment she closed the door and again tried to read her dull book.

"I am a goose," she told herself at last, aloud, dropping the book, an endless chronicle of the uninteresting virtues of an uninteresting man, born without any capacity for anything *but* uninteresting virtue, on her knees.

"There surely is nothing in the fact that that man thinks me pretty, to make me feel so—so—unlonely," she thought. "It isn't as if I knew him and had him to talk to; it's

just nonsense, and I wonder what Samuel would say." But it was none the less true that from this time on all yearning for Samuel's strong wing ceased utterly.

At dinner the big man's eyes again pursued her, and once or twice she was hard put to it not to smile, which of course would have been utterly disgraceful.

An old German woman sat at her table this time, in front of the mirror, and Lily answered her remarks politely enough, but she wished the old German woman had not sat just there.

After dinner the train stopped an hour at the Siberian frontier for the luggage to be examined. When her boxes had been passed, Mrs. Drummond, well wrapped in her fur-lined coat, began to walk up and down the platform. It had rained and the mud was deep, but she wanted exercise.

Passing the train, she went on into the darkness, watching now the starlit sky, now the shifting trains on her right.

Suddenly she heard on the stone coping

behind her a strong, firm tread, and for one second she longed to fly. She knew that it was the big man and she felt that he would speak to her. What he did was most unexpected.

Flashing a pocket electric lantern across the platform, he said quietly:

"There is a positive lake in front of you, Mademoiselle; I feared you might step into it." Then they were again in the darkness and he went on in a gentle voice: "It is very wet."

Still she did not speak, and after a pause he said:

"I am Prince Serge Troumetskoi. Perhaps as you are alone, you will allow me to be of some use to you?"

"Thank you. You are very kind," she stammered.

He laughed. "Kind? Not I—I am lonely. Will you not take my arm?"

She did so. So he was a Prince. It all seemed quite natural.

XV

"BUT—I am not Mademoiselle, Monsieur le Prince," she stammered, a few minutes later, as they sat in her compartment, "I am a widow."

He had assumed her to be a widow, judging by her bonnet, but it is, to men of his stamp, one of the banal rules of the game to assume that all attractive women are unmarried.

"Pauvre enfant," he murmured, his red lips moving very slightly under his big moustache, "you are very young to be a widow. You are going home?"

Tears, as much nervous as sorrowful, rushed to her eyes.

"Ah—no—I have no home. "I am going to—to Clapham. To his father and mother."

Troumetskoi knew his London well, and he had heard of Clapham.

"Ah, mon Dieu! But you will not like Clapham; you will not be at home there."

Suddenly she clasped her hands and looked up at him, forgetting *him* for the moment, and only remembering her own future.

"Oh," she cried, "you know it? You have been there? Tell me about it."

"But no, I have never been there. No one has. It is a mysterious and awful place, known only to its own inhabitants." He laughed. "Where did you learn such French?" he went on. "It is not the French of Stratford-atte-Bowe."

"No, I have never been to Stratford. My mother was French, and until I was married I lived at Boulogne with my grandmother."

She had taken off her coat, and sat very upright, facing him. She looked, he thought, like a Tanagra statuette in black. If she were well dressed her figure would be marvellous.

"And you have lived in China since your marriage?"

"Yes. We were missionaries."

"Sapristi!" The man's curiosity was really piqued. He was full of superficial lore about life in its less noble aspects; he thought that he knew women very thoroughly, but something in this girl puzzled him.

"That is," she went on, wondering at her former phrase, "we *are* missionaries."

"And you—converted the Chinese?"

"Yes," she answered, with the simple faith of her class.

He rose. "I wish you a very good night, Madame," he said, with the utmost respect, "and, until to-morrow, good-bye."

When he had gone she closed the door. Then, feeling very weary and disappointed, she sat down again.

"I wonder why he went," she thought, "and why he was so strange at the last."

She would have been vastly amazed if anyone had told her that his sudden access

of respect had disappointed her. This was the case.

As for Troumetskoi, he went into the restaurant and sat for an hour with a vodka bottle and a glass, cursing the Fates who had put such a soul as the little widow's into such a body as hers.

"A missionary, by God!" he thought, "of all things on earth, and believing that she converted the Chinese. Oh, là, là!"

He was more than annoyed, he was almost indignant; but he had given up the game and was making up his mind to a solitary journey, not, be it understood, that respect for the status of missionary withheld him from further pursuit of Mrs. Drummond; it was simply that a woman whose mind, whose spirit could allow her to become a missionary could not, he thought, be sufficiently attuned to his spirit to make even a casual flirtation possible.

So two disappointed people went moodily to bed within ten feet of each other, and the wheels of the train kept on turning.

The next day was amazingly long and lonely for Lily Drummond. The Prince, as she of course called him in her mind, not at all sure that he was not of royal birth, bowed to her most courteously, paused at her table and asked her if she had slept well.

But he no longer stared at her, and this made her angry and sore.

"I suppose he didn't think me pretty close to," she thought resentfully; and all through the long day she thought of nothing but the man and his strange behaviour.

She slept badly, and as soon as she woke, went into her little dressing-room, determining, as she splashed about in the tiny place, that she would, if the Prince spoke to her, treat him very coolly.

Troumetskoi, meantime, had put her quite out of his mind, and was, as he shaved himself, laughing over a picture in a very coarse paper that he had bought the day before.

And Lily Drummond would without a doubt have lived the life of Clapham all the

rest of her days, but for a trick Fate played on her a moment or two later.

She had not noticed the little door leading out of the dressing-room, opposite her own; she had not realised that she shared the dressing-room with the occupant of the next compartment—Troumetskoi.

Thinking that the place belonged entirely to her, she went back into her compartment, leaving the door wide open and, her blue cotton crêpe kimono unfastened from her throat down, began to twist up her hair.

It is well known that no attitude so well shows off a beautiful figure as the one with the arms raised and curved to the head. With a long coil of hair twisted in one hand, she turned to reach the hairpins hanging in a little case over her bed, and Troumetskoi, opening his door of the dressing-room at that moment, saw her young white body in all its beauty, outlined against the blue kimono.

He stood for a second motionless; then with a little scream, she saw him, and he slammed his door.

Dropping her hair, she lay down on the bed and burst into helpless sobs, sobs as genuine as ever were sobs in this world. She felt outraged, insulted, blackened. She felt that never again could she look a man in the face; not even Samuel had ever seen her naked.

Troumetskoi, for his part, finished his toilet with a heightened colour and a puzzled frown. To think that she should be a missionary! But, missionary or no missionary, she was adorable, and—

She did not appear at lunch, and during the long afternoon he stayed warily in his own compartment.

Some apologies are much better made in the evening.

She had her dinner brought to her, and about half-past nine, as she sat drearily looking out of the window, her door was quietly opened, the light switched on, the door closed, and Troumetskoi, sitting down by her, took her right hand firmly in his.

"Dear Madame," he said rapidly, "I cannot apologise for what was no fault of mine, and without being a liar, I could not say that I regret it. But—I am deeply grieved by your grieving, and I beg you to try and forget. In return," he raised her hand to his lips and brushed his moustache lightly across it, "I promise you to try to forget what was—the most beautiful sight I have ever seen in my life."

"O Prince!" She was incapable of words; his assault was so sudden and so skilful that her head reeled.

"That you are divinely beautiful you may not know," he hurried on, "but I know, and still I will try to forget if—if you will."

For a moment she gazed out on the moonlit moorland in which the flaming birches glowed like gold.

"Divinely beautiful!" She, Lily Drummond, "divinely beautiful!" And he, this Prince, had seen her without any clothes on. Horror and rapture were for a moment in-

distinguishable from each other in her whirling mind, and then rapture won the day.

"I will try to forget," she told him. "But,—please let us never talk about it again."

And once more he kissed her hand. This time she felt his lips under his moustache.

"That child said your name was Lily; is it? Lily, Lily," he repeated softly. Then he rose. "It is late—I will go. Good night, Madame," he finished ceremoniously, "and I thank you."

XVI

Lily Drummond woke the next morning with the words "divinely beautiful" ringing in her ears. It was a splendid and intoxicating thing to be divinely beautiful, and she enjoyed it to the tips of her little brown fingers. She had been married for years and yet, mentally, she had only now become a woman; and that this magnificent man, this Prince, considered her beautiful changed her whole aspect of life. In every fibre of her she felt youth, health and beauty.

The sun shone brightly and seemed, as she stood by the window, to be centred on her little self.

The train stopped, and she heard suddenly from the dressing-room that she had vacated herself only a few minutes before, a soft baritone voice singing, so high as to

be almost in the tenor register, an air she vaguely remembered:

"Si tu m'aimes,
Carmen."

She had never heard an opera; she had never heard an orchestra. It must have been her old grandmother who had sung this scrap of one of the world's masterpieces. For since her marriage her only music had been hymns, and now she realised suddenly, but quite unmistakably, that she had never liked hymns.

"Si tu m'aimes,
Carmen."

The man's voice was untrained but melodious. At the end of the phrase he sang out, and the final notes brought the blood to his hearer's cheeks, as he meant them to do.

"I wonder if he's married," she thought, with a sudden and unexpected fierceness. For a moment she stood with clenched hands and drawn brows, and then with her old

cry, "How silly I am!" she went in to breakfast without an idea of what it was that had happened.

Troumetskoi knew, he,—as the French put it. He was in love again, and he was glad; for to men of his temperament it is a tremendous bore to be out of love. The woman was beautiful, young, and although a missionary, he no longer doubted her capability of understanding; for, he argued primitively, a woman built like that could not be a cold-blooded prig.

He was an essentially simple creature, this big Russian, who reasoned from his senses to his mind; he was a genial, kindly, unscrupulous, animal, generous, selfish being. He was a man of honour, brave, even foolishly so, and his boast was that he had never deceived a girl. But a woman? Why not?

"They have brains as well as we,—or think they have, dear little things. I am not a criminal," and reasoning on these lines, he would not have been ashamed if his

own mother had known what he was about, regarding Lily Drummond. The old Princess, indeed, would, had she known, have shrugged her virtuous shoulders and murmured something about "Ces folles Anglaises" and wondered how Serge could find anything attractive in one of them.

But Lily was to him quite extraordinarily attractive. Her beauty was of the kind that made strong appeal to him, and there was about her a certain mystery that piqued his curiosity more than it had been piqued for years. She was a missionary; she was, he saw, more truthful than most women; he knew by the instinct that is so much stronger than any mere reasoning, that she had lived a perfectly blameless life.

And yet there were in her possibilities of a very different nature, and although his beginning had been so successful, although his attraction for her was perfectly visible to him, he now found himself at a loss how to continue his campaign, and this added a marvellous zest to the affair.

Lake Baikal lay spread, for hours, under the train windows; beautiful, vast, blue waters, too much like the sea to be regarded as a lake; and the birches, beloved of Tolstoi, touched by the hands of September, blazed like yellow torches amongst the changeless pines.

That one day was beautiful, and Troumetskoi, who loved nature, sat for two hours before lunch with Mrs. Drummond, gazing out of the window. She found him rather silent, and, to be strictly truthful, she found him rather dull, that day. When he was audacious and masterful, some new thing within her responded and understood; but when he sat frowning at the blue water beneath the golden trees, she was at a loss. Nature to her was a closed book, and she had lived so long by the ocean, that she no more thought of gazing at it for hours than she—or for that matter anybody else—thought of gazing for hours at the sky.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" he asked her occasionally.

And she answered without even feigning enthusiasm, "Oh, yes."

They always spoke French together and to her the use of the language of her girlhood had a strange charm, as if she had gone back into the years, as if she were quite a different woman from the missionary who had spoken English.

But though silent, the man was by no means thinking only of the beauties of the autumn day. Almost at once he felt that his attitude piqued his companion, and none knew better than he the value of pique in matters of love. It was out of her obviously sincere character, as a missionary, to resent his abstracted respect of manner, but her resentment was thoroughly in keeping with that other character whose existence he vaguely felt. And that other character was the one in keeping with his ends. So, deliberately, he sat staring out of the window, his fine profile turned to hers.

Presently she took up her book and with crimson cheeks began to read. Her lips

were parted and her fingers nervous. These things he saw and after a moment he rose, and with a polite word or two, left her.

When he had gone, she lay down with her face in the pillow.

"If I am divinely beautiful," she repeated over and over again, "why does he treat me like this?" She was hurt and angry and felt as if a door had been slammed in her face.

He, meantime, smoked, and smiled to himself occasionally.

"Ça marche," he thought, "ça marche."

At Irkutsk they changed trains, and he took the occasion to speak to her again. "Might he be of use in calling a porter to carry her bag?" and so forth, and "would she like to walk up and down and get some air?"

But in her anger, she refused frigidly, and when she had established herself in the other train, went out again, for there is a long stop at that delectable town, and started

to walk alone. She was in the depths of angry despair and ready to believe he would never again speak to her, when suddenly their positions were reversed and the whip was thrust into her ready hand.

"Mrs. Drummond!"

Wheeling round, she found herself looking into the face of one Jasper O'Neill, a Chinese Customs man, who was an old friend of one of the missionaries in China, and who, after a fever, had once stayed with those friends for a month.

It all came back to her in a moment, the pleasant autumn days three years ago, when O'Neill helped with the singing at the Mission, and once even sang some mildly secular songs to the accompaniment of a wheezy harmonium. He had been a cheerful, rather racketty youth, and not at all approved of by Samuel Drummond, but secretly enjoyed by Lily; and here he was at Irkutsk.

"Mr. O'Neill!" Her luminous eyes flashed with real pleasure, as they shook

hands. "You are going on in our train?" she asked presently.

"Only as far as—," a name she did not catch. "A pal of mine is ill there and I am going to look him up."

They walked back and in the crowd came Serge Troumetskoi who, on seeing them, stopped short and then turned away.

Mrs. Drummond had seen his face and the moment was a mile-stone on her road; the unsophisticated little missionary knew from out the depths of inherited lore, traceable surely to Eve herself, that Troumetskoi, who had neglected and hurt her, was jealous; and as composedly as if she had spent her life in the polite intrigue of drawing-rooms, she said with a bubble of laughter, as they passed the Russian: "Oh, Mr. O'Neill, I *am* so glad to see you."

O'Neill glanced at her, a little surprised. This tone was new to him. Later, seated in her compartment, he ventured to tell her she had changed.

"I am older—"

"No; it's not that, but you used to be such a little Puritan,—and now—"

She laughed. "And now—?"

"Well, I don't know—you're more like other girls."

Troumetskoi passed the door as she spoke, and Lily looked up at the young Irishman in a way that would have made the estimable Samuel turn in his grave, if he had seen it. On the other hand, her forgotten mother would have chuckled, as people do in seeing their own engaging little wickednesses reproduced in their offspring, and Troumetskoi writhed as, followed by another of her delicious bursts of laughter, he went on to his compartment.

O'Neill dined with Lily, and it must be confessed that the sight of the Russian's furious white face in the glass added a keen edge to the young woman's appetite.

As for O'Neill, an amorous Irishman, "fed up"—as he would have said—with the solitude of nearly two years spent somewhere up the Yang-tse, he lost his head.

He told Lily she was beautiful, and he must see her the following year in England, and towards the end of the meal he sent for champagne and made her drink some. She had never tasted it before, but her mother had, and she liked it. It reddened her cheeks and brightened her eyes, and lent to O'Neill's words a pleasant vagueness; and just before they left the table he uttered a phrase that was destined to become a kind of mental catchword to her: "You little devil!" he said.

And Lily was delighted. "A little devil!" She had thought herself a missionary, but it seemed she was not one; she was a little devil.

When O'Neill, most unwillingly, got out of the train, two hours further along the line, and stood watching the express leave the station, Lily leaned from the window and waved her hand to him. It was a moon-lit night and the sleeping world was lovely.

Suddenly someone came in and slammed the door.

"Who is that man?" Troumetskoi asked harshly.

She turned, laughing. For a moment she did not answer, but eyed him, revelling in her new sense of power.

"Who is he?"

"His name is O'Neill. He is an old friend."

He came closer and took her hands in his, holding them to his breast. Something in her eyes changed his manner, as if by magic.

"You little devil!" he said.

XVII

"FUNNY—that's what he called me!" she said, disengaging her hands gently and sitting down. "Nobody ever called me that before."

"Perhaps," he answered, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief, "you never were one before."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean—well—" Her manner had quite relieved his mind, for her eyes had been unable to continue meeting his, and she had blushed under his gaze.

After a pause he went on, enjoying these preliminaries as a gourmet enjoys the hors d'œuvres of his dinner.

"You puzzled me very much at first. I am beginning to understand you, I think."

Her eyes grew dreamy. "Are you? I

am just beginning not to. Tell me about myself."

He loved talking—Troumetskoi—and he talked fluently.

"Eh bien, in the first place you are a missionary, or you were one, and that is so strange."

"Strange?" Deeply interested in that most interesting study—herself—her eyes were like stars.

"Yes, tell me why you chose to be a missionary."

"But I didn't choose it. Samuel was one before he married me, so of course I was one too."

Troumetskoi threw back his head with a little shout of triumph.

"Voilà! There it is! There you have it. My theory has never failed before and it does not fail this time. Listen, I will tell you. Do not interrupt."

Leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, his hands clasped, he explained his theory.

"I believe, I have always believed, that

every person born into this world has a vocation. It is absolutely certain that Nature has intended certain men to be doctors; and if a man meant to be a doctor becomes by some mistake—and these mistakes, mind you, occur continually—a jockey, he is absolutely bound to be a bad one.

"Our Tsar, as you English call him, was meant to be an excellent, bourgeois père de famille; the German Emperor is a born actor, and so on, and so on. Well, I was born to be a soldier, with plenty of money, and that is what I am, and so I am happy.

"Now you, my dear Lily, when I met you and you told me you were a missionary, I was puzzled, for, I take it, small children are rarely *brought up to be* missionaries. I assume that it is a profession that must be adopted when one is grown, and then you, with your looks and your temperament—"

"What is 'temperament'?" she asked calmly.

"Well, it is the physical soul—the—an affair of imagination and circulation, and—

well—you don't look like a woman who would enjoy telling the story of the Cross to men who crucify some of their criminals to this day."

Lily watched him. "Well, I didn't enjoy it exactly," she said simply, "though it was very wicked of me. They never listened to me, somehow, the way they did to the other ladies. I did my best, but my best was bad."

"Exactly. And do you know why? Because you did not find the vocation meant for you. You let your husband choose for you, and he chose wrong. You should have been—well—anything rather than that."

"I see. And I dare say you are right."

There was a long pause, and then Troumetskoi laid his hand on hers.

"Only another case of mistaken vocation. They are as the sands of the sea; these cases, but it is most rare that a person who has started on a wrong vocation gets the chance to begin again."

Lily Drummond started. She was too quick-witted not to see that her chance to

begin again was due to the fact that her husband had died, and she was honestly shocked.

"But I—I was never unhappy," she faltered. "I was quite content there, with them, and my husband was an angel to me. You mustn't think—things."

Troumetskoi's eyes met hers very gently, but held them steadily until he had quieted the little tumult he had roused.

"I am sure he was," he answered, "but I am glad that you are now to see the world."

"I don't imagine that Clapham is very beautiful," she returned, a little ruefully.

"No, but Paris is. You may go there some day; you're half French, so what could be more natural? Let me tell you what a pretty woman's day ought to be. Let me see. You used to get up at eight?"

"At half-past six."

"Ah. And it was cold in winter? And your bath was a huge earthenware bowl, in which you sat doubled up, with your knees under your chin. Well, in Paris you'd be wakened, say at nine or half-past; your maid

would open your blinds, the room would be warm, you would put on fur-lined slippers and a silk dressing-gown, and go to your bathroom. It would be of white marble, the tub, a hollow in the marble floor, nearly as big as your bed and full of warm water that smelt of violets. You like the scent of violets?"

"Yes, oh, yes; go on," she answered eagerly.

"After your bath probably your maid would rub you all over with sweet-scented oil of some kind, and then you would go back to bed and have your chocolate on a small silver tray,—the cup of transparent porcelain,—and your letters."

"But I never have any letters,—ah, yes, the mission ladies will of course write to me now," she concluded with satisfaction.

"Yes, yes; of course. Eh bien, breakfast in bed, a silken duvet over you."

He paused, for she was listening breathlessly, and he did not know quite how far he dared go.

"Well?"

"Then you would be dressed. Your linen would be brought in in a basket, it would smell of orris, it would be as thin as the thinnest pocket-handkerchief—and—there would be lace on it. Your stays—pardon me—would be of satin, very flexible, and on your dressing-table would be gold and ivory toilet things. Then, while you were dressing," he flushed a deep crimson, "someone would come in whom you—cared for."

"Oh, you mean my husband?"

"Y—yes, or if by bad luck he was married to someone else, he would be your best friend, and you'd go for a walk with him. You would lunch in your dining-room, a short, very delicious lunch, and afterwards you would read, write, or go shopping in your electric carriage. Then, in the afternoon, after tea, you would rest."

"But I shouldn't be tired," she interrupted naïvely. "I never sleep in the daytime."

"But you would be dining at a big restaurant."

"Tell me what a big restaurant is like. I've never seen one, you know."

He reflected for a moment. "Well, beautiful walls, tapestried, or gilded and hung with satin brocade; many small tables surrounded by smart people who are mirrored and multiplied in big looking-glasses; marvellous food and wine, excitement in the air, lovers whispering together, beautiful frocks, —it is indescribable. Then, after dinner, you would go to a theatre, perhaps, and see beautiful things. I can't describe a theatre, —don't ask me to." He laughed.

"Yes, and then?"

"And then—home to bed," he concluded, rather lamely.

She was silent for a moment and then said slowly: "It is all exactly like a fairy tale."

"Yes, only fairy tales are impossible." He had fired his own imagination by his words, and was breathing quickly. It was eleven o'clock and the moon was rather maddening.

"Li—ly," he said to her, softly.

"Oh, you mustn't call me that. I—I was thinking about Paris and I forgot you were here."

"Well, remember me. I want to kiss you."

And she wanted him to. She knew that, and was amazed, but her training had had its effects.

"No, it would be wicked," she stammered. "He has only been dead a month."

Troumetskoi's face hardened. "What does that matter? I want to kiss you, and you want me to, that is enough."

But she set her lips stubbornly. "No, I will not let you. I have done very wrong in talking to you so long. Please go."

He rose. "Very well, I will go—but—I will not come back."

For a second she faltered and then, seeing by his face that he was suffering, she was, of course, suddenly strengthened.

"That must be as you like," she said quietly. "Good night."

Without speaking, he went.

XVIII

ALL the next day Serge Troumetskoi kept his word and did not go near Mrs. Drummond.

And because things are just as they are in this wicked world (there is no better reason than just this, for many things over which foolish wise people waste hours of reasoning!) the longer he stayed away the more she missed him.

The hours dragged. Seated in her corner, her unseeing eyes fixed on the landscape, her mental eyes, those eyes which in spite of the worthy Wordsworth are more often the curse than the bliss of solitude, gazed at the pictures the man's ready words had painted for her the evening before.

It was the idea of the long bath tub that most attracted her. She had never seen a bath tub other than the battered round tin

thing she had inherited from her English father, and the earthenware bowls usual in the East.

And to lie in warm water that smelt of violets seemed to her a very dream of delight.

Indeed, her whole imagination basked in the sunshine of the things Troumetskoi had told her of; the delicate linen, like the finest pocket-handkerchiefs, the gold and ivory dressing-table things; the thin china for her morning chocolate.

And as to being rubbed with scented oil, she actually shivered with pleasure at the thought. It must be admitted that in his way Troumetskoi was an artist.

By the time evening came, Lily Drummond was in a tremor of nervous excitement. There was something in the man's healthy animalism that greatly attracted her, and as she watched the sun set in a glory of colour, known perhaps only in countries where the winters are very cold, she admitted as much to herself.

"I suppose I am very wicked," she

thought, "but I should *like* him to kiss me."

What she had no idea of was that it was the hitherto dormant passion in herself that responded to his. Even in her thoughts now, she spoke French. Small characteristics that had lain unsuspected in her all her life now stirred and woke. She seemed to know things she had never learned. She knew, for instance, that the Russian's absence hurt him as much as it hurt her; and it hurt her intensely.

But he did not come. So far as she could see, the mere man was sunk in the Prince.

To her, his princedom was something very wonderful.

The man, she felt, had condescended to her beauty, but now her coldness had banished the man, and in his place ruled the Prince, much as the Prince's rule tortured his lesser self.

And she was very lonely. Her one book —for she was no reader and had not thought to bring more than one—was dull, and its pages breathed boredom to her.

For hours she sat and dreamed of the man the other side of the gaily-painted partition that separated her from the Angry Prince.

How charming he was, how well he talked; how strangely his blue eyes gleamed in his brown face. And how a sudden deepening of his voice had made her shiver. She wished to shiver again; he had frightened her and she wished to be frightened again. He had told her of travel, of life in Paris, but vaguely she felt that he could tell her of worlds far greater.

Life in Clapham would, she knew, be the more dreadful for the brief glimpse she had had of other possibilities. The images of her father- and mother-in-law leapt, fully detailed, into her mind, visualised with cruel keenness.

They would repress her and disapprove of her; they would make her go to chapel and listen to prayers; and suddenly, sitting in the now disregarded splendour of her compartment, she told herself that she did not

want to go to chapel or to hear prayers. They bored her; they had, she realised in a flash, always bored her. She remembered days and hours at the Mission when she had, without knowing it—so closely was her mind held by Samuel's—hated the whole thing.

She was shocked by this revelation of her own abominable wickedness, but she faced it unflinchingly. It was true then, what the Prince had said; it was not her vocation to be a missionary. That was the vocation Samuel had chosen for her.

"The next one," she exclaimed, her face blazing with colour, "I am going to choose myself!"

This great resolve was enough for the time. She was tired and hungry, and going into the restaurant, she ordered tea.

A moment later Troumetskoi came in.

"Bon jour, Madame," he said politely, his heels together.

"Bon jour, M. le Prince; will you not come and talk to me?" she added hastily, as he was

about to pass on. "I have been thinking . . ."

With another overwhelmingly princely bow, he sat down oposite her and looked at her with cold eyes.

"Thinking?"

"Yes." Stirring her tea nervously, she drew a deep breath. She was pale and frightened; her intention failed her. What if, after all, he did not suffer in neglecting her? Suppose he was simply tired of her? She gave a nervous little shiver, and he saw it.

"Tell me," he said gently.

"Well, about what you said about my being a missionary—about—vocations. I —think you were right."

"My dear lady, of course I was right!" There was in his voice a shade of surprise, also, she believed, of a princely kind. "You would be wasted in such an existence."

"But you see, I am very poor. And, I hate old women—" she paused and then went

on hurriedly, "I never knew before that I hated old women, but I *do*. And so I couldn't be a companion. As to being a governess—I don't know enough, and besides, I don't much like children. They make me so tired, asking questions."

"I see." His solemnity was prodigious, as he listened with bent brows.

After a pause, she continued. "And I thought, perhaps, you would advise me, as to the choice of a vocation, I mean."

With some difficulty Troumetskoi restrained a laugh.

"You honor me with your confidence," he said, with a grave aloofness beautiful to behold. "I will think. It is a serious matter. I will reflect, and,—let you know this evening." He rose. "Until then, chère Madame, good-bye."

"Good-bye," she faltered.

He seemed so very far away from her, so immeasurably her superior, that she could have wept, for very self-pity.

Going back to her compartment, she sat

until dinner, thinking aimlessly about the future. The past had ceased to occupy her mind; it was, like poor Samuel, dead.

When she went in to dinner, Troumetskoi came and asked her if he might dine with her.

"Why not?" he cried gaily; "it is dull to be alone, and a sin to be dull in this beautiful world!"

Gone the Prince, gone the superior being of lofty mien. Come the gay, enchanting person who, she knew, still wanted to kiss her.

"We will have champagne," he cried, "and drown our sorrows. Waiter!"

The champagne reminded her of O'Neill, and O'Neill of Troumetskoi's very obvious jealousy a few nights before. The subtle sense of power stole back to her; again the whip was in her hand.

"You are right," she said; "the world is splendid. I feel as if I had just been born."

He leaned towards her over the table. "Pull your hair loose over your ears," he said

softly. "There, a little more, voilà! It is lovely hair."

"It is very long," she answered, patting it with her thin hands; "it comes below my knees."

The dinner was in reality rather bad, but to her it was good. The red cabbage soup, into which one put spoonfuls of sour cream; the strange cut of beef; the limp cucumbers in the salad—everything was good.

And the champagne was nectar, straight from Olympus.

"I *do* like champagne," she said, suddenly, draining her glass. "It makes everything seem so *easy*."

"Doesn't it? But things aren't all so easy. For instance"—he paused, looking at her with half-shut eyes. "For instance,"—his gaze held hers—"it is not at all easy for me to sit quietly here—"

Then Lily Drummond made her first consciously coquettish speech.

"You are tired of me?"

"You little demon!" He filled his glass

again. "What I want to do—and you know it—is to take you in my arms and—kiss you to death."

It was banal, but it was true, and his voice rang with feeling. She laughed, though her heart beat hard.

"Think how shocked these good people would be."

"Why are you so horrid to me?" Also banal, but useful nine times out of ten.

"I am not horrid."

"You are. However, after dinner I shall go to my own compartment and lock myself away from temptation, so let's enjoy the present. Madame Lily, you are adorable!"

Her face had fallen, but at his last words it cleared.

"You are very strange, Monsieur—"

"Serge. Je m'appelle Serge."

"Monsieur Serge, you say queer things."

"You make me think queer things. Or no—not queer, for it's part of *my* vocation to love beautiful women."

"I am not beautiful."

He smiled. "You are going to be." He waited until the waiter had taken away their plates, and then added: "When you have loved."

"Oh!" For a moment she was frightened. "But I have. You forget—"

He shook his head. "I forget nothing. That was only affection and habit. Love is very different."

"Is it?" she murmured absently.

"Yes. Come. You don't want any coffee, do you? Let us go."

XIX

"Love," repeated Troumetskoi, when they were in her compartment, "is very different—"

She turned. "You seem to know all about it. I daresay you have loved a great many times." Her voice was a little sharp, at which he covertly smiled.

"I have loved, thank God, a great many women. Men speak of being in love as an event. To me, it has always been an event, and a most painful one, to be *out* of love! And in that sad case I was when I got into this train!"

Lily did not speak. His voice, as well as the champagne, made her head swim.

"Shall I tell you about it?" he went on. "But no, first we must have a liqueur. You will like Benedictine."

He rang, and until the man had brought

the liqueurs, allowed her to sit in silence while he watched her face, which was pale and tense.

"Drink that stuff—do you like it?"

"Oh, yes, it is sweet, and it burns—"

"Like love, ma Lily. Listen, like a good child, and I will tell you a story. Shall I?"

"Yes, please."

Folding her hands, she listened through the golden haze in which she seemed to be floating. And his voice was like music, like music of the wicked, worldly kind that she had never been allowed to hear.

"I have been at Tokio for the last two years as Military Attaché to our Legation. And *she* was there. That is to say, I took her with me. Do you understand?"

"Oh, yes," murmured Lily indifferently. It would not have mattered to her just then if he had taken twenty women to Tokio.

"The Jap women are very pretty—I know lots of them. But I—no, mine was a European. She is French—an actress, and one

of the most attractive women in the world," he went on. "She has a charming house, half European, half Japanese, an hour from town, by the sea, and we were very happy indeed. It lasted eighteen months and then —it ended."

"But why?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "She tired of me. At first I was very miserable; I suffered tortures for a time. Then we began to quarrel, and it ended with a big row. She went off the next day with an American banker."

Lily started, horrified through her golden haze. "How awful! What a wicked woman!"

"Not at all. A very good sort in her way. Their tempers usually *are* bad when they are annoyed. But she—why she sent me back a lot of jewels I had given her, and that, of course, is most unusual. By the way—" he paused for several seconds, and then, rising suddenly, went into his compartment through the door by the window.

After a moment he reappeared, carrying with him some big leather cases.

"Look," he cried, opening the top one.

She had never seen a beautiful jewel in her life. Try to realise what that means, and then try to realise the surprising glory of the barbaric necklet of great emeralds and diamonds that he was showing her. It literally took her breath away, so that she could only put her hands to her throat.

"You like them? Look at these."

In the other cases lay several emerald rings and half a dozen bracelets set with stones of all colours.

"Oh!"

Smiling, he refilled the liqueur glasses. "Drink that—it's good for you."

She obeyed him almost unconsciously, her eyes fixed on the jewels. When she had set down her glass, he flung the necklace round her neck.

"Look at yourself," he commanded.

"I—I—they are so beautiful!"

"Open your frock at the throat; they are meant to lie on the bare skin."

Her hands trembled, so he unhooked the collar, and tucked it in. Then *his* hands trembled.

"No—no—make it like a ball-gown," he said."

"I have never had a ball-gown."

But she had seen pictures, and a moment later her white young bosom was bare above the black of her frock, and the jewels shone and flashed and sparkled on it like fire.

Then he put the rings on her little hands, and the bracelets on her arms, and she stood in front of the glass admiring, adoring her own beauty, the veriest pagan ever born.

"Lily—I love you."

His arms were round her now, and he kissed her. After a moment she pushed him away, and stood leaning against the door.

"I—like being kissed," she said slowly.

"Of course you do. Oh, you beauty, you darling, come here!"

"But I feel ill—I feel faint."

He opened the window and made her sit down in the corner.

"Are you better now?"

"Yes—no. I feel ill."

"You are not ill. But—Lily, you love me."

His hoarse voice aroused her, for there was in it something very strange to her. Something remarkably unlike Samuel's.

"Do I?" she asked.

"Yes. And—that is your vocation, to love. To love me."

But he had gone too rapidly. She took off the necklet, the bracelet and the rings and put them back into their cases. Then she said very slowly:

"It may be. You may be right—I don't know. But I will think, and tell you to-morrow."

"Lily—"

"No, you must go now, please."

His face set sullenly. "You have sent me away once, and got me back," he said; "you

cannot do it twice. I will not be played with."

"Go," she returned unmoved. And he went.

XX

The following morning the breach was healed, for Troumetskoi had the wisdom not to spoil a waiting game by refusing to wait. Lily's sense of her own power was plainly visible to him, and its naïvete delighted him.

From the utter, bare, unimaginative ignorance of her benighted missionary state she had leaped, as it were, into a consciousness arrived at, as a rule, only after several of the experiences precisely the lack of which it was that lent this charming person such an intimate and peculiar grace.

She put him to a very real torture, it is true, but while he writhed, he watched, and the spectacle enchanted him.

For three days she refused absolutely to let him kiss her, or even to take her hand in his, and this, as a waste of time, he resented. But—her quality was so rare, her develop-

ment so butterfly-like, that the shreds of the cocoon that, so to speak, still clung to her, brought her new brilliance into beautiful, though exasperating, relief.

The three days, therefore, passed not altogether unpleasantly, and on the evening following the last of them, Miss Butts stepped forth and played the rôle predestined for her.

It was about nine o'clock, and Troumetskoi, suddenly losing his head and his patience, seized Lily's hand as they sat in her compartment, the door open. Just at that moment, Miss Butts, whom a heaven-sent sore throat had kept cribbed, cabined and confined for the last three days, appeared in the doorway. She wore round her throat a not very becoming wisp of dingy flannel, and her curls had given way to dank locks of uneven length and greasy consistency.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello," returned Troumetskoi, still holding Lily's hand in his.

"I guess I know what *you're* doing," re-

turned the invalid with a knowing croak; "you're spooning! When's it going to be?"

"When's what going to be?" asked Lily, laughing, without withdrawing her hand.

"The wedding! I was bridesmaid once, and I wore sky blue and silver slippers. My, it was lovely."

Troumetskoi burst out laughing. "Go away, Miss Butts," he said; "you are an awful child!"

When the "awful child," very indignant, but having fulfilled her mission, had disappeared, he turned to Lily:

"Would you like to marry me?" he asked curiously.

She shook her head. "No, thanks—I—I'd rather not," she answered.

"Amazing woman! As a matter of fact, I have one wife already, and the prejudice of society would not permit me to have another. But just out of interest I ask you, why not?"

Her eyes met his unfalteringly.

"Because—well, I don't know. I like you

very much, but—I shouldn't like being your wife."

That most idiotic quality, retrospective jealousy, having its seed sown in the heart of every man, Troumetskoi flushed at her remark, and the big vein between his eyebrows swelled and darkened.

"You didn't mind being *Drummond's* wife—"

For a moment she reflected with the little measured air common to conscientious people. "No—but that was different."

"How do you mean, 'different'?"

She folded her hands. "It is hard to explain," she said still in French. Then suddenly she changed to English, as if to suit linguistically, the matter of her thoughts.

"You see, Samuel was very different from you. He was as different as—black from white, as water from wine, but—he was no more different from you than *I*, this me that I am now, is different from the me I was when I was a mission-lady."

She remained silent, her eyes dreamy, as

if she expounded more to herself than to him, and presently he said, his face clearing:

"I see. I am glad that you realise the difference."

"Oh, yes, I realise it," she answered, once more in French. "How could I help it? It is as if I were a different woman. I have been wondering what God thinks of it."

Undefined Atheist though he was, this speech rather shocked the Russian.

"God probably doesn't bother to think," he murmured. "He *knows,* you see."

"Oh, yes, of course He knows everything. He knows I can't go back in my mind and have missionary feelings again, of course. It comforts me to think that. Only—I am sure Samuel would be dreadfully grieved if he knew,"—she broke off, flushing brightly.

Troumetskoi, who had been at a loss what to say, felt his feet once more on solid ground.

"Why should the late Mr. Drummond be grieved," he asked carelessly, "because you

have made a more or less amusing acquaintance on your way to Clapham? Dear lady, do not exaggerate. At Berlin, on Tuesday, we part company, each, I trust, with a pleasant souvenir of the other, and we shall probably, the world being so large, never meet again. Why, therefore, should Mr. Drummond be grieved?"

She stared at him, her mouth quivering, the adorable mouth made for laughter.

"But—but—" she stammered.

"Yes?"

With the cruel pleasure native to his race, he watched her face as she struggled to regain her composure.

"I—I don't know—I—"

"Lily!" He had her in his arms, her face against his, and she could feel his heart beat. "Lily, I was teasing you. I love you, you know I do—and we shall not part at Berlin—"

He said good night to her a little later, and went and smoked in the restaurant car.

The game was now in his own hands, and

he felt no compunction, but an unusual tenderness was in his heart. She was so young, so little, so—innocent. And it will surprise no one who knows anything of men, that the very innocence he was destroying was to him Lily's greatest charm!

It was after twelve o'clock, and Lily having knelt and said her prayers exactly as usual, lay in her bed in the moonlight, her long pigtails spread evenly along the red blankets. Her eyes were shut, but she was not asleep. Could she ever sleep again, she wondered.

The Prince loved her and she loved him. Oh, yes, it surely must be love, although it was not in the least like the untempestuous sentiment she had felt for the excellent Samuel.

It was certainly a great pity that the Prince had a wife, otherwise he would, of course, marry her (although, as she had said, she did not particularly wish to be his wife, or anyone's again). It would have been very simple.

As it was—

A phrase of Sister Smith's uttered in one of their talks before Drummond's ukase had gone forth, in some narrative of her early days, came into her mind.

"It was a pity 'e was married, dear, but there, it wasn't *'is* fault, poor darling, seeing as 'e'd married before 'e'd ever set eyes on me!"

At the time, this remark vaguely understood by Sister Drummond to be of the nature of an excuse, had carried little comprehension with it. But Lily Drummond, beloved of a beautiful Prince, understood it.

She was restless and tried prayer, a simple narcotic whose efficacy she had often experienced though never before consciously summoned. It failed.

Then, as she had safely seen the eighteenth sheep lumber over a fence, the dressing-room door opened, and Troumetskoi came in.

"Don't be frightened," he said hastily; "I only want to say good night to you, my little love."

He sat down on the edge of the bed, and put his arms round her. "Lily, if you tell me to go, on my honour as an officer and a gentleman, I will do so. But—I will never come back. First kiss me, and then tell me. I will keep my word."

She did not answer. Bending slowly, he kissed her. When he raised his head from hers, she lay quite still, her eyes shut, her face as white as her pillow.

"Lily—shall I go?"

There was a long pause, and then she answered faintly, but with a new, firm note in her voice:

"No, stay."

XXI

Mrs. Drummond maintained her unexpectedness, to Troumetskoi's great joy, in her way, the next morning, of accepting her new position.

He had felt, on awakening, a pang of fear that the missionary spirit in her might possibly make itself evident, and he hated scenes as mad dogs hate water. If she had wept, he would have dried her pretty eyes, for in his way he loved her, but drying eyes, however pretty, was not in his line, and in his admirable simplicity he knew it.

But Lily's eyes were dreamy, not wet, when he went into her compartment after breakfast, and she let him kiss her as if he had been kissing her for years.

"You darling," he said.

She smiled at him. "I suppose I am what

good people call a bad woman, now," she observed serenely.

"You are what *I* call the greatest angel on earth," he returned, full of gratitude as well as love. She looked exquisitely pretty, and a little air of proprietorship towards himself, an air more common to newly engaged girls than to women in her position, positively enraptured him.

"I have been thinking," she went on perfectly unembarrassed, "how awful it would have been if we had met—well—before."

"Before what, my little dear?"

For a minute she hesitated, but only because she was struggling to find exactly the right words.

"Suppose," she said at last slowly, "I had met you while—while I was married, I mean before I was a widow—it would have been awful, wouldn't it?"

"Frightful," he agreed gravely.

"Then—I am so glad I didn't meet you until after poor Samuel was taken. The Bible says the righteous are very happy in

heaven. Samuel was very good, very good indeed, so it stands to reason, I think, that he *cannot* look down and see what is happening. Don't you think so?"

He showed every tooth in his head, in his amused laughter.

"Oh, priceless woman, what have I done to deserve you? Of course I think so, but you *do* love me?"

Her eyes darkened. "I love you," she answered, leaning her cheek against his shoulder, "you know I do. I never knew I could love anyone so much. Isn't it wonderful?"

It was wonderful, even to him, and the wonder endured, for she was that rarest of things human, a perfect mistress. Good wives are frequently to be met with, in spite of what pessimists write and say to the contrary, for a wife has in common with her husband, many interests besides those of love, but a good mistress is as rare as a good emerald.

And Lily was in her way perfection. She was not so much in love as Troumetskoi was,

which, of course, was to her advantage, but she loved for the first time, and with the ardour of her Latin blood. At the same time she was gentle, amusing and absolutely unexacting, although she had been so rebellious in her own mind before she had come to this understanding. Now she knew that her Prince loved her, and the kind and the measure of his love satisfied her completely.

He gave her the emerald necklet, and she wore it night and day, loving its barbaric splendour with the passionate enthusiasm of a child.

The long train moved comfortably over the plains, across the great river, past numerous cities whose names ended for the most part in "sk," the weather was fine, the world seemed full of joy.

Then one evening—Moscow. Marvellous city of green roofs and gilded turrets—city of jewelled churches, of ancient and romantic palaces, of excellent restaurants, of portly, padded cab-drivers, of wayside shrines.

The hotel, its restaurant perfectly respectable by day, as completely the contrary by night, was a revelation to Lily Drummond, whose rapid development of epicurean tastes amused, as well as delighted, her lover. He took great pains to arrange for her meals that would please her, and her childlike greed was delicious to behold.

They went to The Hermitage and ate caviar, and drank with it a gorgeous fiery liqueur that lived in queer long-necked bottles; they sampled the Slavinsky Bazaar, where the fish one eats are caught before one's eyes in the huge tank in the middle of the room. And they bought furs.

"Mr. and Mrs. Troumetskoi" spent many thousand roubles in the big fur shops, and Lily's quality of childlike greed proved to apply not only to food and drink, but to all the good things of life as well.

Wrapped to her eyes in sables, she was so different a woman from the little missionary of a month before, that the good Samuel,

if he *was* looking down, probably did not recognise her at all.

Troumetskoi was enchanted. He was too rich to have to count the money he spent, and he was really very much in love. Also, greedy of pretty things though Lily was, she had no ugly love of valuable things. She knew nothing of money, never having had any, and he took good care not to let her know what his presents cost.

After a week in Moscow they went on to Berlin.

"A horrible city," Lily declared, "all but the statues." By the statues she meant those in the Sieges-Allee!

Then they hurried on to Paris, and their honeymoon was at an end. For at the Hotel Chatham was installed, waiting for her husband, Princess Katia Troumetskoi.

"Ah, my Lily," he cried, as he left Mrs. Drummond in her gorgeously ornate apartment in a large hotel in the Champs Elysees, "how I hate to leave thee!"

"Yes, mon chèri," she returned, "I hate it too. But you will come to-morrow."

Her unfailing philosophy rather hurt him at that moment, but he too was a philosopher, and soon recovered his content in her wisdom. Anything was better than tears and clinging arms.

He came the next day, and the next, and every day. It amused him immensely to watch the unfailing coming true of all his prophecies.

Lily loved her bath, her chocolate, her finery, as much as he had predicted. The first time he took her to a big dressmaker's in the rue de la Paix, her self-confidence took him quite by surprise.

She had not lost her gentle manner or her soft voice; she had none of the queenly hauteur of most ladies of the half world, but what she said was listened to by the elegant vendeuse with more than the usual perfunctory respect. The one model was too gay—the next "of too heavy material for such a

little woman"—the orange trimming on the third was very ugly indeed. Quite sure of herself, the ex-mission lady sat there, refusing to take what she did not like, and extraordinarily sure of what she did like.

She was moderate in her wishes, sincerely opposed to extravagance, possessed, in a word, of instinctive good taste.

Troumetskoi, who had come if not to scoff, at least to be amused, remained to admire.

"You are a marvel," he said in English in the lift.

A quick frown drew her delicate brows together. "Do not speak English to me," she said.

And he did not ask why.

XXII

One day in the following May, Troumetskoi drove up in his motor to a small white stone hotel near the Bois, and, ringing, stood whistling softly in the sun till the door should be opened.

When, after a short pause, it did open, the solemn English butler informed him that Madame de Faid'herbe was not at home.

"She 'as gone for a walk, my lord, in the Bois, but breakfast is ordered for 'alf-past-twelve."

"Very good, Squirrell, I'll come in and wait."

Squirrell, who of course understood perfectly well what was the status of the lady he served, but whose ambition in life was to pretend that he did not know, drew back respectfully, and Troumetskoi went into the drawing-room. The house had cost him a

pretty penny, as the saying goes, but it was a particularly charming house, and he had never regretted the price, especially as he knew that Lily had not the remotest idea of its value.

There was a tiny garden in front of it, now ablaze with flowers; and at the back of the silver-coloured drawing-room was a large bay-window filled with rare and exquisite orchids. There was in the room a faint scent of lilac, of which essentially Parisian bloom great branches stood about in tall jars.

"By jove, it is as characteristic a room as I ever saw," reflected Troumetskoi, sitting down and looking round him. "Extraordinary where she gets her taste!"

He had filled a low bookcase with delicately bound books. Lily never read a word, he knew, nor did she make the usual pretence of doing so; but the books were ornamental. On a table stood a photograph of himself, unframed. He liked its frameless condition, as unofficial.

Presently he rang and asked Squirrell to bring him a glass of iced Apollinaris.

A purple enamel clock on the mantelpiece struck half-past twelve as he set the empty glass down on the salver, and at the same moment he heard through the open windows over which the silken blinds were discreetly drawn, the delicious little crash of Lily's laughter.

He smiled unconsciously. He remembered, as poor, translated Samuel had done, the first occasion on which he had heard it in the train, when its remarkable musical quality had caused him one of the keenest pleasures he had ever experienced.

And this pleasure had never lessened. Every time she laughed in that way of unrestrained delight his pleasure was as great. It was the most beautiful laugh he had ever heard in his life.

But at what could she be laughing now, in the street? She, usually so dignified, so quiet.

He went to a window and, drawing up the

blind, but himself remaining hidden by the delicate lace curtains that emerged from the drawn-back grey satin ones, looked out.

The gate was just closing on Lily, who still laughed, and on three of the most extraordinary figures surely, that ever were seen on the threshold of the house of a woman in her position.

"'Ere we are," Lily said, waving her hand; "this is my house, and breakfast will be ready. I hope you are hungry."

"We 'ad breakfast at seven," answered one of the party, wonderingly.

Lily's rose-coloured sunshade slipped softly down its ivory stick.

"Of course, of course," she said, "I mean luncheon. We call it breakfast here in France."

She wore white from head to foot, and, compared to her hideously clad guests, looked a slim and flawless lily indeed.

As they came into the blue-tiled hall, Troumetskoi, very puzzled, met them.

Lily started and a bright blush swept up

over her face. Obviously she had forgotten him.

"Bon jour, Madame," he said, ceremoniously, bowing low over her hand, adding quickly, "Who on earth are your friends?"

To the surprise of everybody she again burst out into her exquisite laughter, and sitting down on an ancient Venetian wedding-chest, gave full play to her enjoyment.

Then, at last, wiping her eyes, she said, turning to the three strangers, "I *do* beg your pardon,—I had invited Monsieur—Monsieur *Ours* to breakfast, and then forgotten all about him!"

The strangers, a bearded man, a woman and a lank hobbledihoy youth stared at each other, and the youth giggled stupidly.

For a moment Troumetskoi was inclined to be angry, for he had not felt like a bear, and a bear she called him.

"Monsieur Ours," he said stiffly, in English, "regrets that his presence is inopportune, and will not detain you any longer."

But she jumped down and caught his arm. "Voyons, Serge," she pleaded, "pardonne-moi. It is," she added hastily in French, "some of my old friends from the Mission, and of course I invited them to breakfast. Do not be cross, dear."

Then he was presented to Sister Bland, Brother Bland and Master Sydney Bland, who bowed their very best bows and treated him to hasty contact with their moist warm hands.

They were not attractive physically—the Blands. Brother Bland's large and unkempt beard did not hide so completely as he believed, his cravatless condition, and the only comparative freshness of his collar.

His black clothes were worn shiny, and now, as well, powdered with the dust that lay in the wrinkles of his unblacked boots.

Sister Bland looked but little better, for the beaded mantle she wore had lost most of its beads, and her bonnet, decorated with black poppies and a tuft of green grass, was as shabby. Sister Bland's nose was long

and crooked, and her teeth were mostly things of the past.

Master Sydney, the erstwhile little boy who had wept on the pier that day long ago when he and his sister were embarking for England, was ungainly, and strangely mottled as to complexion. In fact, the less said about his complexion the better. He had also a startlingly deep and untrammelled voice.

Monsieur Ours did not look forward to the breakfast he had expected to partake of tête-à-tête with his hostess, and as the party settled itself at the table, it is to be feared his thoughts were not as holy as the presence of that little band might have demanded.

And yet, in ten minutes' time, Monsieur Ours—Mr. Oors, as the Blands called him—was doing the very utmost in his power to please and gratify the missionaries. Lily's delight at seeing them was so real, her hospitality so alert, her eagerness for news of the Mission so evidently unfeigned, that a

new element crept into his feelings for her. What a dear she was!

"And so you have been here for three whole days," she was saying, "and I never knew! Oh, Sister Bland!"

Sister Bland took a second helping of jellied eggs, scraping busily at the truffles, which she appreciated.

"But we didn't even know you *lived* in Paris, dear Sister Drummond," she declared.

Troumetskoi, whose eyes at that moment fell on Squirrell, half rose from the table. Was Squirrell going to faint? But the man recovered himself, and no one but Troumetskoi had observed the sudden way in which he had set down the silver dish he was holding.

"We sail on Friday, as I was telling you," pursued Sister Bland, "and glad we shall be to get back to the dear Mission. There's no place like 'ome, Mr. Oors."

"Exactly," assented the Russian courteously.

"And Syd's going out to take a look to see if he'd like to become a labourer in the Lord's Vineyard. Aren't you, Syd?"

Syd, scarlet in the face from Chablis and embarrassment, assented, and his father caught sight of his glass.

"Shame on you, Sydney Bland! Put that glass away from you. Do you want to perish in eternal flames?"

"Sister Drummond ain't a-goin' to perish in eternal flames, is she?" growled the boy, and Squirrell left the room in precipitation.

"The brethren and sisters will be glad to hear you're so comfortably fixed," remarked Sister Bland, as they at length rose from the table and went into the next room for their coffee. "I suppose they'll be as surprised as we were, to see you so prosperous. Your grandmother is dead, you said?"

"Yes, she died just after you left the Mission."

"Left a goodish deal, didn't she?" pursued Brother Bland, kindly-curious.

Troumetskoi listened, as curious, in an-

other way. What would Lily answer? She was a bad liar, he knew.

She sipped her crême-de-menthe. "She left me," she answered without haste, "everything she had in the world." And this, Troumetskoi knew to be the absolute truth.

At half-past-two the Blands took their leave, making an appointment with Lily for the following morning. When they had gone, he kissed her gently.

"You are a dear little thing," he said. "And what are you going to do to-morrow?"

She looked at him, clear-eyed, like a child.

"I am going," she returned, "to buy presents for everyone at the Mission, so please give me a lot of money."

XXIII

EUGENE SQUIRRELL, who had been born and brought up in the groves of Tooting, debated for some time in his own mind as to whether this new revelation might constrain him to leave Madame de Faid'herbe's service.

His deliberations left such visible signs on his countenance that Lily asked him kindly if he was ill.

"No, Madame; thank you; I am quite well."

"But,—you don't look quite yourself these last few days, Squirrell," she persisted.

"I'm perfectly well, Madame; thank you—"

"Then perhaps you have had bad news?" she asked, looking up at him in such solicitude that his reserve broke down.

"I beg pardon, Madame," he burst out; "it's this: ever since I was a little nipper so 'igh, I've given five shillings every Christmas to the Bledsoe Mission. My father was old Mr. Bledsoe's coachman, so we was brought up in the Mission, in a manner of speaking. And—well—when I 'eard those people talking about it the other day at déjoonay, it came 'ome to me that—that per'aps I ought to leave."

But she did not even hear the outcome of his speech.

"Your father old Mr. Bledsoe's coachman, Squirrell? What an extraordinary thing! Really most curious. I lived at the Mission for eleven years—from the time I was married—"

Squirrell nodded gloomily. It was one thing to serve a lady who was what he privately called a wrong 'un, but quite another to serve a renegade from that sacred band to which he had sent nearer forty than thirty, five-bob pieces!

"I know, Madame," he answered, taking

up the tray with the coffee things on it and regarding it gloomily.

"I used to teach in the school, and sew for the poor heathen," she went on, much as if she were referring, so detached was her manner, to a former existence, say in Mars. "Eleven years. I should never have left," she added thoughtfully, "if my husband had not died."

"Your *husband* died, Madame!"

She looked up, and beheld hope beaming at her from Squirrell's red face.

"Yes, Mr. Drummond died, of course—Oh, you may go now, Squirrell," she added, suddenly realising the difference in their positions, and feeling rather ashamed of herself.

Squirrell left the room, but he did not leave her service. The fact of Drummond's being dead made all the difference.

"She couldn't stay on there alone, I suppose," he told himself, "and that's 'ow it all 'appened. I'll send ten bob this Christmas.

XXIV

THAT summer Lily went to Ostend, which of course delighted her to the depths of her being. Business forcing Troumetskoi to go to Russia for a few weeks, he found a chaperon for the Ostend visit,—a "belle marquise" type of old woman, whose stormy past had left on her face an expression of the utmost sweetness and light.

Lily at once became very fond of Madame d'Avricourt, and Troumetskoi departed with a feeling of comparative safety. He was sincerely fond of his mistress, and hated to leave her. And being fond of her, he was of course very jealous.

"You will be a good girl?" he said with a smile, but his eyes grave; "you will not flirt?"

Lily laughed. "Me flirt? But I haven't

the remotest idea *how* to," she answered; and he knew that she spoke the truth.

"But—you won't forget me?"

This hurt her feelings. How could she be so ungrateful as to forget him, her dear Serge, who was so good to her?

He had to comfort her for his unnatural suspicion. When he came back from Russia, he at once went to Ostend and found the two ladies thoroughly enjoying themselves. Their salon had, of course, a balcony overlooking the sea, and even Lily's maid, Babette, was satisfied with the Hôtel Splendide.

"Are there many people here whom you know?" he asked almost at once. She shook her head.

"No. Monsieur d'Herblay is here; we dined with him last night; and the little Vicomte de Foljambe. He has his big motor, and we went to Bruges last week."

She looked very well and, he thought, prettier than ever.

"Has she been sage?" he asked Madame d'Avricourt.

That dowager nodded with a peculiar smile. "It is an angel, cher Prince," she said, "but a real angel of heaven. If pretty young wives were as faithful there would be no place in the world for us others!"

Troumetskoi, whose wife was at Vichy, thoroughly enjoyed his honeymoon. The only fly in his ointment was Jules d'Herblay, one of his greatest friends, whose friendliness and sociability were, now, in the first raptures of his reunion with Lily, rather a bore. D'Herblay was short and rather stout, but extremely smart and, in his own opinion, *très anglais*. His admiration of Lily was undisguised, and he appeared to expect Troumetskoi to enjoy it.

"You are devilishly lucky," he used to say, "devilish lucky!"

Lily smiled placidly at his enthusiasm and once when Troumetskoi was scolding helplessly about the fellow's constant presence, she asked in perfect good faith: "Then why

don't you tell him to keep away from us?"

Her indifference to the very English one was evident and unfeigned.

At the big race-meeting la belle Madame de Faid'herbe created a real furore. Her gown was of all gowns the most perfect, her style of beauty, in a place where that commodity unadorned is at a very serious discount, pleased the connoisseurs the more in that their appreciation of it flattered their own vanity. She was not painted, her lips were innocent of the gory-looking pommade so popular among ladies of her standing; her clear young eyes were guiltless of burnt cork, or whatever it is that these same ladies consider so irresistible; she looked absolutely respectable, ma foi, yet,—behold, we admire her!

A Russian Grand Duke was greatly taken with her, and asked her to dine; a very monied Hebrew nobleman from Cologne was heard to swear that he intended to "souffler" her from Troumetskoi; and Mesdemoiselles

Lucienne de Montmorency and Yvonne de Rohan, whose hatred of each other was notorious, became almost friendly in their scornful depreciation of "la Béguine," as the brilliant Yvonne named her.

The name stuck to her and "La Béguine" she remained. Indeed, there was something nun-like about her serene little face; an aroma of the cloister seemed still to cling to her, in spite of her beautiful clothes.

"She is diantrement the prettiest girl of the lot," the Grand Duke cried to Troumetskoi, "and if you ever find it necessary to part with her—"

Troumetskoi was deeply gratified by Lily's success, but at the same time he was too fond of her to enjoy some aspects of her fame, and he was not sorry when she was again installed in her little hôtel near the Bois.

As for Lily, she was perfectly happy, which is in itself a remarkable and beautiful circumstance.

XXVI

It was in the following spring, just about a year after the visit of the Blands, that something happened.

Lily now owned, in addition to her house, her emeralds and various pretty rings and trinkets of value, a rope of very fine pearls, a large touring car, and furs worth, her maid knew, fabulous sums. She had also a great boar-hound of whom she was extremely fond.

She was considered to have done remarkably well, but this she did not know.

One rainy May day, she was sitting in her boudoir looking at a large assortment of hats that had been sent from the Maison Sophie-Adelaïde, when Squirrell's subordinate, a young Frenchman, who had only that day been added to the establishment, ushered in a lady.

Lily, who was in a loose blue négligé with a gold girdle, turned in surprise, a huge black hat on her head. She had never before seen the lady.

"Bon jour, Madame," she said politely, removing her hat and balancing it on the top of a huge pile of open boxes.

"I am Madame de Faid'herbe; you wish to see me?"

The lady, who plainly did not belong to Lily's world, flushed; she was embarrassed.

"Yes, Madame. I—I fear I am intruding, but,—"

But Lily was very hospitable and, apologising for her servant's blunder in bringing the stranger hither instead of to the drawing-room, led the way to that charming apartment and begged her caller to sit down.

"I am," the caller said abruptly, when she had done so, "the Princess Troumetskoi."

"Oh!" said Lily.

"Yes, and I—I know everything."

"Then—there seems no more to be said."

The two women eyed each other for a few

seconds. We know what the Russian saw. Lily saw a dark, rather flat face with remarkably bright black eyes, and lips the redness of which was obviously not altogether due to nature.

The Princess was about thirty-five, looked healthy, and was expensively, if not well, dressed.

"There is more to be said," she returned at length, and Lily bowed.

"I listen, Madame."

"For a long time I have known that—that there was someone. And yesterday I —I made sure."

"How?"

"I saw him come here."

"H'm!" observed the culprit; "you followed him; that was not nice of you."

"Nice! And *you* dare to say that to me?"

Lily laughed, not at all brazenly, nor even unkindly.

"Of course I dare. I am in my own house."

"The house that he—my husband—gave

you. It is—" All the Orgoblenskys are short in temper.

Lily did not speak for several seconds. Then she said civilly: "It is true. He gave me the house, the motor, *these,*" touching the pearls, "everything. He is very kind to me."

The Princess gasped. "And you are not ashamed to say that to me!" She was really amazed, and Lily saw it.

"No; I am not ashamed. He is very fond of me,—he likes to give me things."

" 'Things' such as eighty thousand francs' worth of pearls!"

Lily half rose. "Eighty thousand—*what* did you say?"

"Bah! don't try to fool me! I said eighty thousand francs' worth of pearls, and you know perfectly well that that rope is worth at the very least that much. More likely a hundred thousand."

"Mon Dieu!" Lily stared at the pearls she had caught into her hands. "Can it be possible?" Slowly she took them off. "You

may have them," she added, simply. "I hadn't an idea they were worth so much."

But the Princess drew back angrily. "Absurd! I don't want your pearls. Prince Troumetskoi is quite able to indulge in the freak of giving pearls to cocottes if he likes!"

"I am not a cocotte," returned Lily, unresentfully.

The Princess sniffed. "Indeed! Then what are you?"

Lily hesitated and then said in her gentlest voice: "Oh, well, *that* doesn't matter, does it? Go on."

The Princess was silent. "If you have nothing more to say," resumed Lily, "why did you come?"

The rain had ceased, and a sudden gush of pale sunlight flooded her little figure as she spoke. "Why did you come?"

Poor Katia Troumetskoi! Why had she taken such a mad, undignified step? She asked herself with even greater wonder than Lily had asked her.

"I—I really don't know," she muttered at last; "I am ashamed of myself,—I was a fool."

Lily gazed at her. "Don't be ashamed," she said gently. "You aren't a fool at all, I can see that. And I didn't mean to offend you about the pearls. And I *really* didn't know how much they were worth."

The Princess gazed back. "Upon my faith, I *believe* you!"

Lily nodded, satisfied but without surprise. "Yes; it's quite true. You see, before—before I met *him,* I had never seen such things in my life. I was a missionary, you know."

"A missionary!"

"Yes, in China. That's why I didn't know. About the pearls, I mean. Well—"

The Princess was still staring. "It is quite different from what I expected," she murmured, rising. "I'll go now."

But Lily was thinking. "I wouldn't have come myself," she observed candidly, "but now that you *are* here—you don't mind the

pearls, so you don't mind the motor, I suppose. Well—what is it you *do* mind?"

She was so pretty, so young, so *nice,* that the elder woman suddenly forgot who she was, and broke down.

"Mind? But I mind everything! He is my husband, and—and—"

Lily's delicate little eyebrows rose suddenly to the roots of her hair. "Oh! you mean that you *love* him?"

The Princess—remember that she is an Orgoblensky—burst into uncontrollable tears.

"Yes, I do, I *do* love him," she cried wildly. "Of course I love him, and you have no right—"

But Lily interrupted her, laying one hand on her arm. "Don't cry," she said gently; "it's quite all right. I didn't *know.* That's *all;* I didn't know. Now, please don't cry, Princess. Let me think for a moment." She went to the window and stood for several minutes looking out at the little rain-

swept garden. Then she came back and stood with folded hands before the other woman. "Please don't cry," she repeated, compassionately. "It will be quite all right. You may have him."

Nothing is more momentarily disconcerting than an unexpected victory. Katia Troumetskoi raised her wet face from her hands and, still sobbing, stared.

"Yes, you may have him."

"Serge? You really mean that you will give him up?"

"Yes," returned the ex-missionary to the heathen, "I will give him up. I am very fond of him, but—I can do quite well without him, and you, I perceive, cannot. Besides," she added serenely, taking her caller's elusive handkerchief from a gold bag that the Princess could not open, and giving it to her as to a child, "he's the only one you can have, and I can have all I want."

The Princess gasped. "All?—all what?"

"Men."

"But—"

"Never mind; it is all quite right, I assure you. He's coming to dine to-night and I'll tell him. He has," she added, with a little sigh of regret, "been very good to me."

XXVI

TRUE to her promise given at the very end of the famous interview, Lily never told Troumetskoi of his wife's coming, nor what her reason was for leaving him.

"It is enough," she insisted gently, as he raged up and down the drawing-room. "Je-n'en veux plus!"

"But have I displeased you? Oh, Lily, you are being very unkind," the big man groaned. He was really quite cut up, although the warmth of his feelings had been for some months rather cooling.

"You have been kindness and goodness itself," she said, "and I shall never forget you, Serge."

"Then *why?*"

"That I will not tell you—no, not if you break everything in the room. Voyons, Serge, let us part kindly!"

He came and stood before her, his handsome face sullen and red. "You no longer love me," he declared.

She looked gravely at him, her small face very sweet, as she reflected. "'Tout passe,' you have often told me. Perhaps it is that I do not. Perhaps my love was never very great."

And then, of course, he asked her with a great display of sudden, sardonic indifference: "Who is my successor to be, may I ask?"

After a short pause, during which she was again, it was plain, reflecting conscientiously, she gave him his answer.

"I am not sure, Serge,—but it might be M. d'Herblay. He is very kind, and he seems to like me—"

At this he gave a great roar of angry laughter, which ended less bitterly than it began.

"Mes compliments! Le brave Jules. I suppose it is his figure that has captivated you?"

"He has not captivated me at all, Serge. I like you far better, only—I have decided to leave you, and I must live somehow, mustn't I? Oh, don't be cross, Serge, dear," she went on gently, joining her delicate hands and looking at him in a way that arrested his attention. "*Indeed,* I am only doing what I think right."

"Oh, it's your *duty,* you mean, to chuck me and—and take another lover," he sneered.

"Yes; I mean to say,—I cannot explain, but I am going to do it,—leave you, I mean. And," she went on thoughtfully, "it would be easier to go to M. d'Herblay than to some stranger."

Something in her manner impressed him. He sat down, drawing a deep breath, and lit a fresh cigarette. He was not, he knew, broken-hearted. He had really loved her—he loved her still, and he had for her, moreover, the affection a man always has for a woman to make whom happy he has taken pains. But—caprice was part of the game

and the man who resists a woman's caprice is a fool.

"It is just that, then?" he asked, after a pause. "Just that you wish to leave me, that you think it time to make a change?"

"Yes, Serge."

He hesitated. D'Herblay was not so rich as he, nor was he so generous. To most women in Lily's position, Troumetskoi would have mentioned these facts; but to Lily he could not.

Lily sat watching him, her small face rather wistful. He had been very good to her and she was fond of him. But she had, like most people, her own ideas of fair play, and the idea of temporising with her promise to the Princess did not even occur to her.

"You are not angry?" she asked presently.

He rose and came to her, laying one great hand on her shoulder.

"Angry? No, my dear, I am sorry; for I am very fond of you still, but—I know

the rules of the game. We must remain friends, Lily."

She rose, and raised her face for his kiss, which was indeed a very kind one. "Thank you, Serge," she answered gratefully, "tu es gentil tout plein!"

The clock struck and he waited until it had ceased. Then he went on: "And, Lily, the lease of this house does not run out till December. The stuff in it is all yours, you know—"

She looked seriously at him.

"Yes?"

Suddenly he was embarrassed, as if he had been trying to give things to a lady of his own social position.

"The devil," he said, impatiently, looking at the ceiling; "I mean to say, in two words, you are not *poor* now; I should like to have you go on having the—the usual money—so that you need—be in no hurry—in no hurry to—"

His embarrassment was absurd and annoyed him; but Lily was quite calm.

"I see what you mean," she answered, patting his hand in a little comforting way; "and it is very kind of you—you are *always* very kind. But I shall not stay on here and I don't want any money, thanks."

"But why? You have none of your own and I hate to think of you—"

Again she patted his hand. "Don't worry," she said; "I shall be all right. I will stay here until I have made other arrangements and then, of course, I shall go away."

"But—"

"*Please* don't argue, Serge. You know how tired it always makes me. Indeed, I appreciate your goodness; but I really *couldn't* take any more money from you. It—it wouldn't be right."

XXVII

THE next morning Troumetskoi returned to the little hotel near the Bois, and rang.

Squirrell, who opened the door, was unmistakably agitated.

"Oh, my lord," the man began at once, "she 'as gone away."

"Gone away!"

"Yes, my lord. A telegram came this morning and Babette began packing at once. But she didn't take Babette, Sir, and she didn't say where she was going. Babette thinks something has happened, Sir."

Troumetskoi stood quite still in the delightful May sunshine. The lilacs were blossoming bravely, their scent was mingled with one of tar; the street was being mended at a short distance, and the two odours seemed to the Russian the very essence of Paris.

He suddenly missed Lily intensely. It seemed very dreadful that she should be gone. And where had she gone? Had she, after all, lied to him? Was there another man? He glared angrily at the afflicted Squirrell.

"Did she leave no letter for me?"

"Yes, Sir; there *is* a letter. I—I am sorry, my lord, but I—I really quite forgot it."

In the dainty grey drawing-room, with its scent of lilac and mignonette, and the quiet ticking of its purple clock, Troumetskoi read the letter.

"Dear Serge," it said, "I have gone to England in a great hurry. I have taken all the pretty things you gave me to wear, but I will not have the furniture. Please do not think me ungrateful. I shall never forget you. Do not be angry with me for leaving like this; 'Good-byes' are such useless things. I hope you will always be happy. God bless you. Lily."

Troumetskoi lunched alone that day, and

most of the delicacies he ordered were taken away untouched.

His anger, his misery, were, of course, absurd as well as illogical, but they were for the time very strong. And as he drank vodka, glaring moodily at the tablecloth, they grew stronger, until he felt himself a bitterly unhappy and infamously treated man.

To whom had she gone? D'Herblay was, he knew, in Paris. Cherringham, a young Englishman he himself had introduced to her and whose admiration had been obvious, was laid up with rheumatic fever somewhere in Italy. Pryce—Barrington—no, he was too poor to suit Madame Lily. Where in Heaven's name was she then? He knew everyone she knew in Paris, and not one of them of whom he could think was at that time out of Paris.

Towards four o'clock he left the restaurant, redder in the face than usual, and walked slowly towards his club. She was, without a doubt, like all the rest of them.

In spite of her angelic little face, she had lied to him, fooled him. There was, of course, some other man—probably some vulgar beast of her own class. Perhaps a chauffeur, or a jockey like the man in that novel he had read the other day.

She was just about arriving in London now, he reflected as he went up the steps of his club, and the fellow was no doubt meeting her. Faugh!

All the worst in Troumetskoi's nature was now uppermost and his imagination ran riot in his ridiculous—but none the less human—jealousy.

The Princess did not see him until the next day, for the excellent reason that he did not go home until broad daylight.

XXVIII

When the cab stopped in the chill rainy evening, the cabman climbed down and inspected the name that was, in the wet, almost illegible, on the gate-post.

"Right, Miss," he declared after a pause. "'Ere we are."

Lily leaned out and looked about her. The narrow street, stretching between grimy yellow brick walls, did not tempt her.

"Zion Villa, Miss," urged the cabman, who although no longer young, and decidedly bottle-nosed, had an eye for beauty; "I'll carry yer boxes in."

Lily got out and stood with her skirts gathered up, while the man, having rung, took her boxes from the top of the cab.

In the light of the two street lamps visible, puddles, mud and smoke-blackened walls were all that was to be seen. And the rain,

a heavy grey downpour, seemed singularly unlike the quick, silver showers of Paris.

She paid the man and, as the door opened, stepped bravely into the sloppy, sparsely-gravelled path, whose straight line was faintly perceptible in the light from the open door at its far end.

"Mrs. Drummond?" the invisible person under the umbrella asked her.

"Yes. How—how is Mr. Drummond?"

The invisible one closed the gate and bade the cabman mind the sides of the door and the corners of the stairs, and led the way to the house.

" 'Is body is as bad as can be," she answered slowly, " but 'is soul is full of light."

Lily gasped. It was at once so strange and so familiar. Samuel would have said it, or Mr. Brady, or Brother Blacker, or Sister Penguin—any one of the missionaries, but it seemed years since she had heard such a phrase and her ears had grown strange to it.

At the door a large old woman stood wait-

ing for her, a square-built, thin old woman with a bunch of purple grapes in her black lace cap, an old woman whose face, stern yet emotionally distorted, above the cameo brooch with the weeping willow on her bosom, Lily had known for years in a portrait. Samuel's mother!

"I'm glad you've come," Mrs. Drummond said, blowing her nose, which was red and shiny from much previous blowing. "*'E* would be pleased if 'e knew. Also my poor lost Samuel."

"Yes," returned Lily vaguely, accepting a kiss that smelt of eucalyptus and peppermint and hot buttered toast; "of course I came. How is he?"

"In God's 'ands."

Mrs. Drummond led her guest into the room on the left of the passage and then, in the crude light of an unshaded petroleum lamp, looked silently at her.

"You look older nor what I expected," she declared, "and you aren't so pretty as your pictures. Is that brooch a real topaz?"

"It's a yellow diamond," Lily answered gently.

Mrs. Drummond sat down suddenly. "A diamond! I knew your grandmother 'ad left you money—Sister Bland wrote to me—but diamonds! You will find us too plain for you, I fear," she went on plaintively; "we 'aven't any diamonds—although there are rich folk in the connexion, too. Will you 'ave some tea?"

But Lily was too tired to eat and asked to go to her room.

This apartment, up two flights of stairs, was very bare and much ingenuity seemed to have been employed in the choice of its furniture. It would have been hard to find a bed, a washing stand, a chest of drawers or a chair, uglier or more inconvenient than those destined to her use.

"You'll come down when you're ready," Mrs. Drummond said, as she left her; "I'll be with Silsbee. 'E likes to 'ave me by 'im."

Lily tidied herself and then went downstairs as she was bidden. It was curious

how the old instinct of obedience had come back to her.

Mrs. Drummond, who was again crying, took her at once to the sick room. Here, in an atmosphere thick and unpleasant, lay Samuel Drummond's father, unconscious.

"'E's been like that ever since noon yesterday," the old woman whispered, "only 'e's paler. His face was all purple at first. 'E was going downstairs after dinner and 'e called me. 'Flora,' 'e said, 'come!' I came running out from my room and just as I reached 'im 'e fell. 'E 'asn't spoken since, but twice 'e's looked at me."

"What does the doctor say?" returned Lily, taking the poor old woman's arm kindly. "Sometimes they get well after the first stroke, you know."

"It's in God's 'ands. *'E* knows what's best. There 'ave been fifty-two callers since the news got about. Fifty-two. I could 'ave 'ad 'elp from many ladies in the connexion," she went on proudly, "but as Gladys is ill—that's my nephew Paul's wife

—expecting 'er baby every minute—I thought I'd send for you. Samuel would 'ave liked it."

"Oh, yes, of course," Lily agreed. "I will do all I can to help you, Mrs. Drummond."

The servant who had opened the door came in at this point, every joint in the house, it seemed, creaking under her careful tread.

"The doctor, mum," she whispered, and disappeared.

Lily followed her and sat in the drawing-room waiting until he should go. But he had caught sight of her, and being a man found it necessary to give her a résumé of the stroke and its results.

"Is he going to die?" she asked quietly, when he had ended his report.

He shrugged his shoulders. "That is hard to tell. He is an old man, but he has been very healthy—he very probably may get over this attack."

Lily put one or two questions to him, so much to the point, so unlike the questions

she looked as though she might ask, that he, in his turn, presented one to her.

"I was correct in comprehending that you are poor Sam Drummond's widow?"

"Yes," answered Lily composedly. "Why?"

Dr. Hedges hesitated. "Oh, I don't know," he answered with some lameness; "I only wondered."

He was about forty-five, and looked like Lord Haldane, a resemblance he carefully cultivated by means of pursing his clean-shaven lips and softly rubbing his hands.

"Get Mrs. Drummond to go to bed, if you can," he said, as he left; "she is worn out."

"Yes, I will make her sleep," Lily's answer, so confident yet so gentle, struck him.

"I believe she will, too," he told himself as he hurried home through the driving rain. "Looks as though she'd get her own way."

XXIX

The long days wore by, sinking into each other as drops of slow-flowing treacle sink, losing their identity, into the dull whole of their accumulation.

The old man lay speechless in his bed; the old woman sat by him, piteous in her grief, or interviewed callers downstairs and repeated over and over again the story of the stroke and its results.

"'Flora,' 'e called," Lily heard a dozen times as she passed the door, "and I came and found 'im—"

The people of the connexion, it was plain, sincerely loved the gentle old man who for many years had periodically thundered threats of hell-fire at them. They mourned his illness, they sympathised with his poor old wife.

Scraps of conversation about the Lord;

about the wisdom of *His* acts; about Mr. Drummond's certainty of salvation, reached Lily from time to time, and she found herself falling back into the once familiar phraseology as if she had never left it.

"The dear Saviour is watching over him," she told Mrs. Drummond on one occasion; "he is one of *His* lambs, remember." Half-forgotten things about the old days in China came back to her mind; Samuel, of whom she had not thought for so long, became again a close, almost living, personality.

"Samuel used to say," was often on her lips, or, "I'm sure Samuel would think—"

Paris seemed like a dream. Sometimes she told herself that it, the house, Troumetskoi, all were unreal, that she had been imagining them.

On her first Sunday in Clapham she went to chapel, and the hymns they sang were familiar to her, word for word. The very smell of the close little place carried her back to the Mission. The language she heard was the language of the Mission, the

preacher who took Mr. Drummond's place looked like Brother Smith, the little organ squealed and chuckled just as squealed and chuckled the one so many thousands of miles away. Lily had only to shut her eyes to see that other chapel.

Often, too, she dreamed of Samuel, and her old feelings of admiring submission came back to her so strongly that she could not shake it off even when she awoke.

She never once dreamt of Paris or of Troumetskoi.

One day she found she had been a fortnight in Clapham, and she could not believe that the time was so short. Had she, she asked herself seriously, ever been anywhere else? Once she opened her jewel box and looked at the emeralds and the pearls to convince herself that it had not been all a dream.

She was not bored; she had no wish to go away; in tending the old man, who slowly grew better, and in caring for the old woman, she seemed to be perfectly in her proper place. When people stared at her in

surprise, she wondered why. She had forgotten that Paris clothes do not bear the stamp of Clapham.

When six weeks had merged into the past and the old man was sitting in an armchair by the fire, able to say a few words which Lily understood better than anyone, something happened.

The sun was trying to shine and the sooty trees in the garden were at last really green. June had come; and the window was opened quite an inch from the top, "to give Silsbee some fresh air."

Mrs. Drummond had gone to see Gladys' new baby—who had unexpectedly turned out to be twins—and Lily was sitting near the old man reading aloud to him. She was reading a sermon, a composition of much elegance of language, besprinkled thickly with the threats and curses so loved by the connexion.

Hell-fire, brimstone, everlasting flames, the worm that gnaweth, the torment that dieth never, these brightened every page,

and Mr. Drummond was thoroughly enjoying himself. His violet, wrinkled lips moved slowly in tardy pursuit of the anathema so comforting to him; his thin old hands stirred on the arms of the chair.

There were pink-lined sea-shells on the chimney-piece, and a white marble clock with Mercury, balanced in outrageous defiance of the laws of gravitation, on the top of it. There were two large blue vases full of pampas grass. On the large mahogany table stood gilt-edged books, arranged in a wheel-like pattern; there was a rug with a flaming-eyed poodle embroidered on it; the chairs were of green plush, the sofa was of horse hair. The wall paper was ochre and chocolate and of a dismal pattern.

No room could have been in greater contrast to that delicately beautiful one near the Bois in Paris, and yet Lily did not rebel at it.

In fact, she thoroughly approved of the clock, and the rug reminded her of the long since dead Folichon.

"Oh, my brethren," she read, instinctively lowering her fresh soft voice to a professional drone, "when the Last Day comes and we stand at the Judgment Seat, what will our feelings be? When we gaze at the radiant throng in the pastures of Paradise, and then at the yawning abyss whence come the groans of the damned—"

At this delightful climax the door opened and two people, whom Lily had never seen before, came in; a tall fair man with a grave face and gentle eyes, and a little child of six, a tiny black-haired thing dressed entirely, it seemed, in embroidery.

"Well, father," the man said, taking the old minister's hand in his, "so here we are, at last. Cuckoo has been so impatient to see you. And how much better you look than I had dared 'ope."

Mr. Drummond nodded and tried to speak. The younger man listened eagerly, and then turned to Lily.

"What is it?" he asked in a hasty undertone. "I—I can't understand."

"He says he is very glad to see you and that he *is* much better."

"I am Herbert Walsh," the young man explained a minute later. "I married his daughter, you know."

"Oh, yes. I am Mrs. Samuel."

"You! *You* poor Sam's widow? How—strange." He had a pleasant voice, and something in his eyes was good to see.

"Why is it strange?" Lily asked simply, but he could not explain and covered his confusion by taking the little girl's bonnet off and settling her in a chair near her grandfather.

Lily had heard that Peggy, Samuel's only sister, had married some years before, but she had not heard of her death until a few weeks ago. She knew that Walsh was a contractor and doing well and an ardent member of the connexion. And now she saw that he was a person to like and to trust.

But this was all, whereas the six-year-old Cuckoo, a commonplace, round-eyed child, a mass of ugly cheap embroidery and

oddly attached blue bows, gave her by some inexplicable freak of sympathy a queer thrill to her very heart.

"Will you sit on my lap?" she said, timidly.

Cuckoo, who was as thoroughly spoilt as only the motherless child of a lonely man can be, cocked her head on one side and answered in an odious tone of affected consideration, "Cuckoo will sit *'ere.*"

Lily fetched chocolate from her room and Cuckoo partook of it in a way messy and lacking in charm that poor Lily, in her bad attack of love at first sight, thought adorable.

"She is *too* lovely," she whispered to Walsh.

And he, poor fellow, watching her clear-cut little face and dainty hands, mentally prostrated himself before her, never to rise again.

"How old is she?" pursued Lily.

"She'll be seven in January."

"Her hair is too *sweet.*"

"Pleased you like it. I do it up in rags at night"

Presently the time for Mr. Drummond's arrowroot came, and Lily, tucking a napkin into his collarless shirt, fed him with a spoon.

It was not a pretty task, for much of the nourishment went astray on the old man's garments, while he made strange, uncouth noises in his throat, but beautiful little Lily, bending over him, unconscious of the graciousness of the picture she made, was very lovely, and Herbert Walsh knew it.

"Cuckoo wants 'er tea," announced the child, and when the arrowroot was disposed of, Lily ministered to her wants.

Cuckoo's head was badly shaped, her neck short, her eyes close together. Lambroso would have disapproved of her, but Lily loved her.

"Will you give me a kiss?" she asked, when the visit was over and she had tied the child's appalling bonnet under its chin.

Cuckoo graciously consented and then

Walsh shook hands with his late wife's widowed sister-in-law. His hands were like ice, and his head seemed to swim, but Lily did not notice.

"Good-bye, darling," she said, hugging the child again, "darling!"

Then, when she could leave the old man, she went upstairs and sat in her room thinking about the wonderful new feeling that had come to her.

XXX

A STRANGE feeling of shyness prevented Lily making any enquiries as to the probability of a speedy return of Walsh and his little daughter. She felt, without in the least knowing it, as a very young girl might feel about the man with whom she has fallen suddenly and bewilderingly in love; she longed to ask and could not. When Mrs. Drummond the elder spoke casually of little Sarah, and it transpired that little Sarah was no other than Cuckoo, Lily blushed behind her teacup.

For several days the young woman went her way as usual, mute on the subject next her heart, and then, just as she had made up her mind to ask when the child was likely to come again, the child came.

They were at dinner, the two women alone; the house reeked with the smell of the

chops they were eating. Old Mrs. Drummond, who had another bad cold, contributed to the animal odour a very strong one of eucalyptus and camphor. She also blew her nose constantly on a handkerchief borrowed from Silsbee—"'er own being so small."

Lily took up the word "small," turned it over in her mind as a possible lead to the subject of Cuckoo, and was about to speak when the door opened and Herbert Walsh appeared, leading his daughter by the hand.

"We've been to the dentist," he explained, his gentle face deepening in colour, "and as it's raining, I thought you wouldn't mind giving us a bit of dinner. 'Ow do you do, Mrs. Samuel?"

Lily, blushing brightly, gave him her hand for a second and turned to Cuckoo, who was pale and red-eyed. Poor Walsh saw the blush and naturally took it unto himself.

"Cuckoo, dear, let me take off your coat," Lily was saying; "*poor* little girl; did the dentist hurt her?"

Cuckoo explained that she 'ated the dentist, she did, and she wasn't ever going to see 'im again, not if father gave 'er *two* sixpences.

The cold chops were sent for, and potatoes and cabbage, both boiled in that genial British sauce, water, returned from their retirement in the kitchen, and the guests partook of these delicacies.

Walsh had on a satin tie of a warm purple hue, and his black clothes were evidently fresh from the hands of their creator. Lily, chancing to look at him, smiled in approval of his kind face. It was well that such as he should be the father of the seraphic Cuckoo, who at that moment was plunging her own fork into the saucer of strawberry jam produced by Lily to make the mutton go down better.

Walsh returned the young woman's glance with an arresting gaze of shy devotion. If Lily's thoughts had been free she would have seen what he meant, but her brain was laden with thoughts of the child.

Cuckoo to-day, because of the long sitting at the dentist's and doubtful weather, wore a red and blue checked frock, of hideous design. Lily would give her a present of a pretty frock. Yes, and a hat. Perhaps Mr. Walsh would even allow her to take the child to a shop herself.

These blissful meditations were interrupted by a summons from the drawing-room to the effect that the old gentleman "'ad swallowed 'is soup the wrong way and was choking somethink awful."

The old lady and Lily followed the terrified servant and after a short interval were joined by Walsh and Cuckoo.

"I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind keeping her, mother," he said diffidently, "as I have some business to see to. I can fetch her by six."

Old Mrs. Drummond, who sat by the now quieted invalid holding his hand in hers, assented.

Then Walsh shook hands and left the room.

Lily, after a moment's hesitation, followed him and caught him just as he was leaving the house.

"Oh, Mr. Walsh!"

He turned, his tall, thin figure in its badly cut new clothes, boldly outlined against the pallid sunshine that was beginning to fill the dismal, smoke-blackened garden. Her hands clasped, she made her request, his eyes resting on her as if he had never before even heard of such a thing as a woman.

"Take her to town and buy her a frock?" he repeated slowly. "Yes, I don't see why you shouldn't, although she has lots of clothes. I am not a poor man—"

"I know, I know, but—it would make me so happy. Besides—" she added, delighted with her newly found argument, "you know I am her aunt."

"Her aunt; h'm, yes. That's true. I suppose, Mrs. Samuel, that being the case, you couldn't make up your mind to call me—'Erbert?"

Now Lily would have called him St. Paul,

or King George if he had asked her. Was he not allowing her to spend money on the peerless Cuckoo?

"Oh, yes," she answered absently, "very glad to. And—oh, thank you so much."

"Pleasure's mine," he returned in surprised gratification. "I suppose, then, I may call you Lily, too?"

"I meant thank you for letting me take Cuckoo out," she returned, a little embarrassed by his mistake. "Oh, yes, call me Lily if you like. May she have an ice—instead of tea, I mean?"

He never forgot how she looked as she stood there so slim and flowerlike in her grey frock. There were pearls in her little pink ears, and green stones on her fingers.

Giving his consent to Cuckoo's consumption of an ice, he hesitated for a moment, and then dashed into the sunlight. He was afraid to stay another second.

XXXI

THE summer passed swiftly for Lily Drummond as summers do to those enveloped in the glory of their first love.

To her the ugly dull house in Clapham was as beautiful as any fairy palace; the abominable food provided by the one servant was ambrosial in its character; to her, no weather could have been more ideal than the undecided characterless alternations of raininess and feeble, chill sunshine allotted to these parts by the weather-god of that year.

For she loved, and it was for the first time.

That the object of her beautiful passion was only a dull-witted child with a badly-shaped head and no gratitude in her heart, matters not. She was not only the first child Lily Drummond had ever loved, but literally the first human being.

Her old French grandmother had been kind, and Lily had been kind by return to her, but for some reason the child had not loved the old woman. Drummond, she had respected, admired, liked and grown used to. Troumetskoi had taught her things and a part of her nature had responded to his, but that had been all.

This little Sarah Walsh had brought her, in her grubby hands, the most wondrous thing in the world.

Walsh had built himself a house in Cumberland Grove, twenty minutes' walk from the old minister's house, and to this residence Lily was invited, a few days after her frock-hunting expedition with Cuckoo.

Yashmak Villa was built of yellow bricks; the windows were surrounded by a kind of conventional garland in red brick; there was an oriental turret, Tudor ramparts on a small scale and windows set in diamond panes. It was hideous and absurd, but it was suited to its neighbourhood and greatly

admired there, so what did it matter what strangers might think of it?

Walsh, himself its designer, was proud of it in his simple way. He was proud of the green satin furniture in the drawing-room, of the gold-flecked dining-room walls, of the cumbrous, over-ornamented furniture that crowded the small rooms. Of its kind, and for his kind, it was a masterpiece.

Cuckoo took her new aunt to see her room, and Lily, whose taste had of late suffered a reversion as to type, heartily approved the purply-pink bower with its glossy white furniture.

There was a pineapple for lunch, among other things, and this pineapple obviously represented the flower of dietary imagination in Herbert Walsh. He beamed with pride as he urged his guest to have just a tiny bit more. "It comes from the West End," he added wistfully; "I went on purpose to get it for you."

Cuckoo, attired in the frock Lily had given

her and the pink socks and white shoes that "went with it," was as beauteous as the day, with her hair done in lumpy curls tied over her ear with a pink bow, and did the honours in a way that enchanted her victim.

"Oh, Mr. Walsh," Lily said later, when Cuckoo had left the room for a moment, "how lucky you are to have such a little angel."

"Yes, I am very grateful," he answered; "it's a pity the Lord did not see fit to bless you and Samuel. However, He knew best."

Lily bowed her head gently. "Yes, He knew best. Is that Peggy?"

"Yes, that's the wife. Done from a photograph—a very good likeness."

The late Mrs. Walsh, in a large oil painting, stood by a marble-topped table, one hand on a vase of roses. She wore a blue frock, and a gold locket on a chain hung round her neck. A pretty woman, in a way, with too little chin.

"Poor Peggy," sighed the widower. "Seemed as if I couldn't bear it when she

was took. But I *could,* you see. *'E* never makes a mistake."

This visit was repeated several times, and nearly every day Cuckoo came to Zion Villa.

Lily bought books and gave the child little tentative lessons, half afraid of betraying her own ignorance. She used also to take Cuckoo driving, an amusement thoroughly appreciated by that young lady.

Old Mrs. Drummond approved of her daughter-in-law's devotion to her grandchild, and more than once expressed her opinion that Lily would probably leave money to poor little Sarah. To this Lily said nothing. She had, after all, continued to use the money she had had in the Paris Bank at the time of her coming to England, but she had not the remotest idea how much she had left. She had never written to Troumetskoi, nor he to her. She knew nothing of what he had done regarding the house or her belongings. There lay between Mrs. Samuel Drummond, of Clapham, and Madame de Faid'herbe, of Paris, an abyss too

wide and deep for bridging. Under Cuckoo's absolute sway, moreover, the late Madame de Faid'herbe had but little time for thinking of her past. Her two lives were so distinct as to seem utterly irreconcilable to each other. She was two separate women, or rather she had been one woman and was now another.

The regular chapel-going habits into which she had again fallen, helped this illusion. More than once as she sat in her hard, cushionless place, listening to Mr. Drummond's successor, she deliberately tried to reinvisage her life in Paris. She recalled to mind her house, her clothes, her day's routine, Troumetskoi. She forced her memory to review these things, but they came before her as shadowy and unreal as projections from a magic lantern, and she gave up with a sigh of relief and fell once more to studying the bored little face of the child she loved.

As for Cuckoo, she had her good qualities. She had at least the gratitude of the vain

woman for those who feed her vanity. Auntie Lily thought her beautiful and good and clever, and this was nice of Auntie Lily. Cuckoo loved fine clothes, and Auntie Lily gave them to her. Cuckoo loved chocolates and there was always a store of these messy dainties in the dressing-table drawer upstairs. Also when Cuckoo told little lies and Grandma Drummond related to her awful stories about 'ell, Auntie Lily comforted the criminal, and felt (once safely out of grandma's hearing) quite sure the dear Lord would forgive such a sweet little girl.

Not a bad child, Cuckoo possessed, or was possessed by, an arid, cold nature and was destined to grow into a selfish, hard woman. In the meantime the graces of even unlovely childhood were hers, and in the warming influence of Lily's passion, they expanded and flaunted.

Walsh passed a wonderful summer, half in Heaven, half in a place of torture unspeakable. He glowed and trembled in Lily's presence, his honest heart lay in an agony

of humility at her little indifferent feet. But she did not see.

And thus more atoms of time were added to the great whole of eternity, and autumn came.

September was a rainy month, and, to add to its sadness, Cuckoo went to beautiful, bracing, breezy Bexhill to visit her paternal grandmother. She was to be gone only a fortnight, but before a week had passed Lily was miserable.

By this time the old minister was well enough to go to chapel occasionally in his old capacity, and his faithful congregation saw with joy that his power of anathema had not waned.

Even Lily admired his purple invective, and wondered innocently that such an old saint should know so much about Hell.

There were several tea parties given by ladies of the connexion in honour of the pastor's recovery and to these wild festivities Lily accompanied her parents-in-law as a matter of course. She had long since been

accepted by them as an integral part of their lives. She was Samuel's widow, so of course she lived with them. They were fond of the gentle little creature, but she had lost her novelty and they took her now as a matter of course—in which line of reasoning she thoroughly concurred with them. She did not reason with herself on the subject or make deliberate plans. She was living in Clapham, that was all. And then—there was Cuckoo.

One day in the second week in September, when Cuckoo had been away six days, something happened.

XXXII

It had rained hard all the morning and now, at 3 o'clock, the low sky had cracked across and a light, not to be called sunlight, but still something brighter than it had shown for days, filtered down on Clapham.

Old Mrs. Drummond had been making calf's foot jelly for a sick friend, and now, finding Lily doing nothing in the drawing-room, sent her daughter to the invalid's house with a jar of the sticky delicacy.

Lily was glad to go out. She was very lonely and felt a vague restlessness that reminded her of the old Mission days. She wanted to do something—anything, she did not know what. And the walk would do her good.

She went on her way, light-footed and graceful, something in her unconscious bearing attracting many glances as she went.

Sister Broadbent was very grateful for the jelly, and the new baby was brought in for the guest's delectation.

It was wrapped in flannel, which Lily loathed; it was of a deep mulberry hue and looked unfinished; its nose was absurd; its bald head, with a palpitating spot in the middle, gave Lily a queer, sick qualm. When she had paid the necessary compliments and made her adieux, Lily stood for a moment at the door looking at the sky.

"No," she said, under her breath, "I do *not* like them; I don't like them at all. And I should *hate* to have one. It isn't that at all—what Mother Drummond said—that that's why I love Cuckoo so much. It's—it's just because she's Cuckoo. If I could have one of her age, perhaps—Ugh!"

At the thought of the pulpy fragment of humanity she had just held in her unwilling arms, she gave a little shudder and walked on.

At the corner she ran into Herbert Walsh.

"You!" he cried. "I was just on my way

to see you. I've a letter from Cuckoo. I thought perhaps—"

"Oh, yes, give it to me, let me see it," she interrupted vaguely, paying no heed to his outstretched hand; "let me see it, please."

The letter, written on a small sheet with an elegant design in the corner, of cranes flying across an angry sunset, was short:

"Dear Father:

"I hope you are well. I am well. Grandma Hicks is well. There is a cat heer. Is name is Mareo. The cook's name is Iserbel. We had veel for dinner. I like veel. Grandma has a new front with grey in it. She gave me some beads. We went to Chapel and I sang all the hims. Iserbel says I sing lovely. Please give my love to Granpa and Grandma Drummond and to Auntie Lily. Auntie Lily is going to give me a lace collar.

"Your loving little girl,

"CUCKOO."

"Oh," said Lily softly. The letter, to her, was beautiful. And to Walsh all the light in the world came from her soft eyes as she looked up at him.

"I have just seen Sister Broadbent's new baby," she went on innocently, when she had given him back the letter. He flushed a deep scarlet. "What is the matter, Herbert?" she asked.

They had reached Zion Villa, and stood alone in the little weather-wrecked garden. Walsh looked at her, something in his throat preventing him speaking for a moment. Then he stammered—

"The matter?"

"Yes—you—you looked so queer."

Again he blushed. "I—I was just thinking. Tell me about Sister Broadbent's baby. Is it a nice one?"

Lily laughed. "No—at least to me they are *never* nice. They are so very ugly."

If she had suddenly knocked him down he could not have been more amazed, more appalled.

"Lily!" he faltered.

Something in his tone reminded her of Samuel, and she felt rebuked.

"Don't be shocked," she pleaded. "I don't mean to be wicked. It is only the very little ones that I—I don't like. You *know how* I love Cuckoo."

There was a short pause, and then he said gently, "Lily, I—I don't know 'ow to say it—if you think it is preshuming, I dare say it is, but—you *do* love Cuckoo, I know, and I—oh, Lily, won't you take us—Cuckoo and me?"

It had never occurred to her that she might marry the man and thus have the child for her own. Even now she did not understand for a moment. Then, slowly, his meaning penetrated to her brain.

"Take you? You mean marry you?"

He was very white now and beads of sweat shone on his forehead.

"Yes, marry me. Oh, Lily, marry me, my dear. I'll be good to you."

But what he might do did not matter much

to her. The intoxicating idea that Cuckoo might be hers had set her heart beating at least as hard as his.

"Why, Herbert,—I—I never thought of that," she faltered.

"Say yes, Lily; *do* say yes, my—my dear," Then he added, with simple craft, "Then you'd always have 'er with you. Will you?"

It was raining again now, but neither of them noticed it, and if umbrellas have a language of their own, these two closed ones may have exchanged remarks on the subject.

"Do you think she would like me to?" Lily asked.

"Like it? Of course she would. *Like* it? Oh, Lily!"

Lily looked up at him. "Why, it's raining," she said, with a sudden outburst of her pretty laugh. "Let's go in."

"But *will* you?" he persisted, as they ran up the path.

At the door she stopped. "Of course I will," she said.

XXXIII

The engagement caused some commotion in the connexion. Walsh was a prosperous man, a pious man and he was very nearly a handsome man. He had been dreamed about on more than one virgin pillow.

Even amongst the unco' godly, such things as envy and malice may flourish and one assumes that at tea parties and elsewhere, poor Lily was not treated with perfect kindness. She was a stranger, she was very pretty and there was a something about 'er clothes. However, no one suspected the truth about her. She was, in spite of everything, poor Sam Drummond's widow, and her behaviour in Clapham had been unexceptionable. Thus the animus against her was perforce reduced in its expression to fears for dear Brother Walsh's ultimate happiness.

Meantime, Brother Walsh soared among the angels in his bliss. Cuckoo, too, was much pleased and Lily herself quite happy.

A visitor of old Mrs. Drummond who lived in the North somewhere, fell at this time and broke an ancient leg, and as Mrs. Drummond was obliged to go and look after her and it promised, at the best, to be a long job, the wedding was not to take place until the late winter, so that Lily could devote herself entirely to her father-in-law. Walsh was disappointed, but he was too unselfish to murmur against what he saw to be a perfectly just arrangement and Lily was delighted by the delay.

Every day Cuckoo came to her and presently, as the ladies of the connexion became used to the idea that Walsh was really lost beyond recall, they began to like Lily and she found herself making friends.

She had joined two sewing societies; she went to lectures on sacred subjects, and listened vaguely to the wisdom thus poured out by various brethren; she visited the sick—

whom she intensely disliked, but who believed themselves to be delightful to her—she learned to handle babies without shrinking; she grew fond of her future husband, and to submit to his shy and awkward love-making was easy to her; he was very like Samuel, only infinitely gentler. She was not only not bored, she was decidedly happy.

That she ought to tell Walsh about her life in Paris, never even entered her head. She rarely thought of that life, and when she did it was much as she might have thought of a far-off dream. She did not miss it, but she felt not the least remorse regarding it. She had not felt wicked while she was leading it; she did not feel wicked in recalling it. It was simply another life, a life in which Herbert Walsh had no concern.

Meantime the autumn had passed and the winter drew to a close.

One day in February, when she had been to Oxford Street to do some shopping for her still absent mother-in-law, Lily decided

to walk down Bond Street and see, as she mentally put it, the pretty things in the shops. The day was mild and she enjoyed loitering along, looking now at the well-dressed crowd, now at the windows. She herself wore a coat and skirt that had lost its freshness, yet bore plainly the mark of former glories.

In Clapham she was, even now, remarkable for her elegance. Suddenly, at the corner of Grafton Street, she became dowdy. She stood staring at herself in a mirror in one of the shop windows and dismay smote her. What a frump she looked! Her hat, too, was a disgrace.

Almost running, she fled from the great street, to find herself, breathless and ashamed, in the quiet of Dover Street.

"I must get a hat at once," she whispered to herself. And as she spoke her eyes fell on a large, gold-lettered word that hung on a quiet-looking Georgian door. *Chose!* Chose in London! For a moment she seemed to be dreaming and back in Paris.

Then she realised that the great man has a London house and that here it was.

Timidly, ashamed of her clothes, she went in and stood by the door, looking round the great empty room.

It was early, and only one lady was there —a fat lady ordering a replica of a frock in which a thin and willowy mannequin was walking up and down before her. Lily smiled, it seemed so familiar.

Then a very grand gentleman, with violets in his buttonhole, came forward and asked her wherein he could serve her. His coat was beautiful and his manner reminded her of Serge.

"I want a hat," she stammered.

"Certainly, Madame, will you kindly sit down?" Then he walked away and spoke to a lady in black. The lady gave a little laugh as she saw the new client, but as she approached her manner changed and, after a moment's hesitation, she burst out in French: "Ah, but it is Madame de Faid-'herbe!"

Lily grew inches at the words and her eyebrows arched slightly. She threw back her head.

"But perfectly," she returned in French. "Of course I am Madame de Faid'herbe. And you—how do you do, Alphonsine?"

The fat client and the three mannequins turned and watched; the gentleman in the beautiful coat returned; two more ladies joined the group, full of offers of assistance in the great matter of Lily's hat.

Mr. Cecil, informed at a short distance away by Mdlle. Alphonsine that Lily was very well known, very successful, the friend of a fabulously rich Russian nobleman, and an excellent client of the Paris house, returned and talked quite charmingly of the weather.

Lily nodded gravely. Yes, it was very bad, the weather. "No, that hat is execrable, my good Alphonsine. Good enough for the English, no doubt, but—"

Mr. Cecil was crushed.

Lily was clever enough to give no expla-

nation whatever of her shabby clothes, and also to remove her gloves and show the rings that she was, luckily, wearing. She bought a beautiful frock, which she was able to wear as it was; a hat which, Alphonsine assured her, was the very last screech in Paris, and a set of silver fox furs.

Then she said calmly, "I will send you my cheque to-morrow," and sailed out of the house.

Mr. Cecil was uneasy, but Mdlle. Alphonsine, to whose Gallic he had long since surrendered, laughed at him and "bet him 'alf a sovereign" that the cheque would come next day,—which, incidentally, it did.

XXXIV

It was not yet noon when she left the great artist's and Bond Street drew her back. For an hour she sauntered along, thoroughly enjoying herself. The day was one of those mildly beautiful ones that from their rarity in our winters affect us poor Britons as wine affects a man dying of thirst.

Remarks on the fine day were heard on all sides: "Better than the Riviera this, what?" Or: "Glorious to see the sun, eh?" It made Lily laugh, she who knew the real sun and what he could do when he liked.

"Nearly warm enough for the river," one youth declared to a girl he was evidently pretending to have met by accident.

People joined each other and walked on in friendly communion that an ordinary bleak February morning would have longed in vain to see. The pallid sunshine seemed to

bring out qualities of geniality, of kindness, of sentiment, even.

For some time Lily walked behind a well-set-up, middle-aged man of military aspect, and a well-preserved, well-made-up woman in black. They had, apparently, not met for some time.

"Dear me, dear me, can it be so long?" the man said, straightening his shoulders, and thereby shaking off a few years. "Yes, you are right. Poor old Simla! We had some good hours there. And you are living in town now?"

Lily listened, unashamed.

"Do I remember?" he continued after a pause. "Of course I do. And you? I thought you had forgotten it all. That last ride, the morning before I left? Ah, Millicent,—if I may still call you Millicent?—" he sighed. But the back of his neck was fat and red.

"He hasn't thought of her for years," Lily decided, unconsciously cynical in her gentle

way; "it's the sun and the mild air that make him sentimental."

Then the man said something that gave her an idea. The Ritz! She had not known there was a Ritz in London. If they were going to lunch there, why should not she?

So the unconscious General Sir Frederick O'Neill (retired) and the Lady Kennerton were followed in their innocent little escapade by a person whose juxtaposition to them would, had they but known of it, outraged them seriously.

They secured a table by the window and Lily, still close on their heels, was given a tiny one just vacated by its permanent lessee, a member of the Russian Embassy. So this was the Ritz?

The gorgeous decorations of the room impressed her profoundly. It was, she decided, almost better than the Paris one. Only Boldi was not there; she would miss him.

The waiter took her order deferentially,

for it was an order marked out not only by knowledge, but by discrimination, and the expatriated one heard not such French every day. Rapidly the room filled. The women, she decided, were older than those in Paris. Really young faces were rare, and the make-ups were less skilful, though they showed a wish on the part of their wearers that they should be taken for the real thing. The unearthly purple-red lips that gashed the faces of the ladies of Paris were not to be seen, nor the ashen cheeks, but very few faces were innocent of chemicals.

"How pretty their voices are," Lily thought admiringly, "and what beautiful men!"

Many people glanced at her; some people stared; but she was quite undisturbed and ate her excellent lunch with thorough appreciation. Her white wine warmed her; she forgot Clapham. If Serge had come in and joined her she would hardly have been surprised. Poor Serge! She wondered where he was. How kind he had been! And

soon, soon it would be the spring. Her mind was so busy with thoughts of Paris, that when someone spoke her name, she looked up as composedly as if she had never left that wondrous city.

"Madame de Faid'herbe!"

It was young Cherringham, tall, beautiful, with, oh, such perfect clothes, and a gardenia in his coat. He had always worn a gardenia.

"How do you do?" she said quietly, smiling at him.

"I could hardly believe my eyes," he went on. "May I sit down? I didn't know you were in England."

"Oh, yes," returned Lily; "I am here."

She was prettier than ever, he decided, and evidently prospering.

"Have you been here long?"

"Yes; I am with some old people, relations, who are ill."

"Oh."

Old relations, who are ill, do not usually play a large rôle in the lives of ladies in

Lily's position. He did not quite know what to say, and she went on before he spoke.

"You have been to Paris again?"

"I? Oh, yes. I was there at Christmas. Saw several of our old friends."

Lily poured out more wine. "Did you meet Serge?" she enquired serenely.

"Troumetskoi? No,—he wasn't there. Someone said he was in Russia—but—I mean to say—"

She wondered at his confusion. "I hope he is quite well and happy," she said. "He is such a very nice man."

Cherringham had heard that they had parted, but that was all. People are not long remembered in that particular society.

"I—I saw Jules d'Herblay," he resumed, after a short pause. "He asked if I had seen you."

"Ah. Ce brave Jules! And he is well?"

"He's well now. He had a bad go of fever in the autumn, I believe. He has got quite thin. Someone told me he had been hard hit in some love affair," went on the

young diplomat diplomatically, "but it may not be true."

"Probably," she agreed.

A moment later Cherringham's party arrived and he bade Lily a hasty adieu.

"Will you dine with me?" he asked, holding her hand tenderly.

She shook her head. "I will think and let you know. I am very busy with my old gentleman—"

She took his card, smiled at him and he left her. When she had had coffee, she threaded her way through the crowd of tables and left the hotel.

It was still sunny. Where should she go now? She took a taxi and drove through St. James's Park. But St. James's Park is not the Bois, particularly in February.

Suddenly, in the middle of her drive, Paris died and Clapham came to life again.

By half-past four she was going in at the gate of Zion Villa.

XXXV

SPRING came early down our way that year. Even March was less fierce than usual, and April crept quietly in, garlanded in delicate green.

May was that most wonderful thing in the world, a real English spring, as sung by the old poets.

In June, Lily was to be married.

On the tenth of May she chanced to find the card young Geoffrey Cherringham had given her. She had never written to him, hardly thought of him. The door of Zion Villa closing on her that February afternoon had seemed to close also on her memories.

She was again Mrs. Samuel Drummond, of Clapham, and Madame de Faid'herbe was —somebody else. But, on finding the card, something stirred in her. She would like to

see him again, to smell his gardenia, to remember Paris.

The evening of the fourteenth of May, a beautiful little lady, clad all in white, was met in the Palm Court of the Carlton—oh, ghosts of all the beautiful ladies who have been met there, do you haunt it, I wonder?—by a rather harassed youth with a small golden moustache.

"At last!" he cried, of course. Why had she not given him a sign of life all this time? Why was she so cruel? And so on, and so on.

Towards the middle of their excellent dinner Lily asked him what the matter was.

"The matter? Nothing. Nothing at all; I am—perfectly all right."

But a moment later when she had accepted his explanation and changed the subject, he returned to it.

"Look here, Madame de Faid'herbe, I've got into the devil of a mess and I don't know how to get out of it. I believe I'll tell you."

The story was simple. The beautiful, joyous, immoral youth had been playing about with a girl and the girl had—hooked him. He had never dreamed of marrying her, wasn't in love with her at all, had never wanted to deceive her, and yet—the engagement was announced and he'd have to go through with it, and he was perfectly miserable.

Lily was truly sorry for him but could suggest only one thing, that he should own up and ask to be let off.

He shook his head. Then he went on to that part of his story that was to be of importance to his hearer. He recalled the joys of freedom, the beauty of being one's own master, the terrible tyranny of matrimony.

"Oh, to think of the dear old days in Paris!" he moaned. "I was as happy as a king, damn it—I beg your pardon—and I don't believe I did a soul any harm."

"I'm sure you didn't, Mr. Cherringham," she agreed warmly.

"And the worst of it is that *she* is rich,"

he pursued, dolefully, "and I, being nearly a pauper, she'll expect to rule me. She'll do it, too—she's got one of those long chins —you know."

When they had moved to the Palm Court for their coffee he burst out again:

"If I'd done any harm, you know, I could bear it better. But I didn't. Just think of the larks we used to have in Paris,—I've eaten my last supper at the Café de Paris, and no more breakfasts at the Pré aux Catelans for this child. And the dear funny little theatres, the Boîte à—what's its name?"

"Fursy," supplemented Lily dreamily. His enthusiasm had carried her back to the old days. She, too, was giving them up for ever. For the first time she realised this: for the first time doubt stirred in her mind.

"And you?" he asked, suddenly, struck by something in her face. "Don't you ever get tired of—of your old relatives?"

She did not answer. She was trying to visualise Cuckoo's face, and she could not quite do it.

After a pause, young Cherringham took from his pocket a letter and handed it to her.

"By jove, I nearly forgot to give it to you. It's from d'Herblay. I wrote him that I had seen you and he sent you this, in my care, nearly three months ago; but that's not my fault."

She looked idly at the envelope. "Thanks, Mr. Cherringham; do you mind if I go now? I am very tired."

It was true, she *was* tired. He, who was cheering up after his third liqueur, urged her to stay, but she persisted gently, and he presently stood alone in the mild air, looking after her taxi.

"Yashmak Villa, Cumberland Grove, *Clapham!* By God, Clapham!" he said aloud.

XXXVI

And the next day it rained. Walsh came to supper and he and Lily walked under a large umbrella to chapel. He was very happy. Her sudden appearance the evening before at his house, her clamouring to see the sleeping Cuckoo, the sudden burst of tears—the first he had ever seen her shed—these things had endeared her doubly to him. And then, against his conscience, he had admired her evening frock. How lovely she was! How beautiful her delicate white shoulders!

"You will be glad to see Brother Penguin," he said, as she splashed ankle-deep in a puddle. "It will be a comfort to you to hear about the Mission."

She did not answer.

"He has been very greatly blessed in his work," he continued as they staggered

against the wind at a street corner; "he will tell us to-night about it."

"Oh, what an awful night, Herbert!"

His heart smote him. He should have got a cab for her.

"Poor little dear," he said, pressing her close to him, "I thought the rain was nearly over or you shouldn't 'ave walked."

The chapel was crowded, and all the windows were carefully closed. Lily's head ached and the smell of wet clothes did not help it.

Old Mrs. Drummond had not come, but the old minister, now nearly restored to his usual health, was in his place and offered up a very long prayer. The singing was probably no worse than usual, but to Lily it seemed almost unbearably bad.

Herbert sang loudly, and she wondered if he always sang so much through his nose?

Then at last Brother Penguin rose. He had changed but little; his scrubby beard was a little greyer, his bald head a little balder, but otherwise he was unaltered.

Even his clothes seemed to be the same as he had worn in China.

He talked for an hour, describing the work at the Mission, the number of converts, some recent troubles with the inmates of the Chinese City, a visitation made to the Mission of the dread cholera. To this, dear Mr. Brady had succumbed and the new minister, a young man, was greatly blessed in his efforts in the vineyard.

Lily closed her eyes and saw it all. The blaze of summer, the bitter cold of winter, the narrow street down by the sea with its crowds of smelling celestials.

She felt that by stretching out her hand she could have touched the corrugated iron chapel, that her ears were filled with the sound of the tinkling, jerking bell.

The sitting-room of her own bungalow came before her, with its pictures, its few books, its rocking chair. Ah Fee came towards her with a smile on his soapy face. Samuel—surely Samuel was upstairs and would come down to her in a minute.

And then—she found Brother Penguin, his face oily with the efforts of oratory, shaking her by the hand. The lecture was over, the lecturer holding an impromptu reception. He had brought her, it seemed, a wedding present, the united gift of the Mission ladies and gentlemen. He would bring it to Zion Villa the next day. Also—here his voice dropped into a key she quite unreasonably resented—he had brought her what he knew she would value, even at this joyful time. He had brought her some flowers cut from dear Brother Drummond's grave.

Walsh was deeply touched by this delicate attention and Lily thanked Brother Penguin as warmly as she could. What, she was wondering, would Geoffrey Cherringham think of it?

The rain had ceased and she walked home between her father-in-law and the man who was to be her husband in three weeks' time.

When she was alone in her room she un-

locked her dressing-table drawer and took from it d'Herblay's letter.

"Dear Madame," it began respectfully. It ended as respectfully: "Your devoted Jules d'Herblay."

But in between came other things. Would she not see him? Cherringham had written that she was with her family. This was most praiseworthy. No one appreciated the value of family ties so much as he, d'Herblay. But surely it could not mean that Paris was to be deprived of her for ever? The city was in mourning for her. As for news, he had little or none. Her going had disorganised their little society. Troumetskoi was in Russia, chained, one said, to the Domestic Hearth. Apropos of Serge, it might interest Madame to know that he, d'Herblay, out of a sentiment, perhaps absurd but God knows how sincere, had acquired from the Russian the charming hôtel near the Bois where Lily had so graciously reigned. The house stood empty now, but nothing in it had been dis-

turbed, not even the pair of long grey suede gloves that Lily had left on the table in the drawing-room. . . . Sometimes d'Herblay went and spent an hour there. Ah, if the house was no longer empty! If its former chatelaine were but back, how different life would be for this old Jules, no doubt merely ridiculous in her eyes! And would Madame de Faid'herbe not send this old Jules, her humble adorer, just a little word? His address was, etc. Might he not hope to see her again?

From the room beneath came the sound of snoring; both the old people snored.

Lily at last folded the letter, locked it away, and got into bed. The bed she realised, for the first time, was hard and lumpy. Ah, her broad comfortable bed at home! *At home!*

For the first time since she had left Paris she thought of her house there by that name.

. . . . . .

"A letter for you, my dear."

Old Mrs. Drummond bustled into the

room early the next morning. "From Paris."

The letter was from her Paris bankers, sent first to her house in Paris, thence obviously by d'Herblay to Cherringham, who had sent it to Yashmak Villa, whence it was now brought by Walsh on his way to business. It was a polite statement to the effect that Madame de Faid'herbe had overdrawn her account to the amount of one hundred and seven francs.

On the outside of the envelope d'Herblay had scrawled: "Do not forget me or my address, Jules."

XXXVII

"'Ow is your 'eadache, my dear?" Old Mrs. Drummond stood by the hard sofa whereon Lily had been trying to rest, and held out a telegram to her. "This 'as just come. The boy's waiting to see if there's an answer."

Lily sat up and tore the envelope open with shaking fingers. She could hardly believe that it did not come from Paris.

"Unable to get back to fetch you, but please join me at door St. James's Hall, 7:30, for big meeting. Dr. Pettigrew, just back from India, presides; fond love, Herbert."

"Any answer?" asked the old lady, inquisitively.

"No; I must see how I feel. It's from Herbert. You may read it."

A few minutes later she rushed into Walsh's house, and, seizing Cuckoo in her arms, nearly hurt the child by the vehemence of her kisses.

"Auntie Lily, whatever is the matter?"

"Oh, Cuckoo, Cuckoo," Lily moaned. "Love me, love me."

Cuckoo preened herself. "Course I love you, only you're crushing my curls."

Lily stared at her, then she laughed.

It was raining when she reached her next destination and, pausing under a just lit street lamp, she took from her purse two bits of paper and looked at them.

"43 Lombard Street, E. C.," she read aloud, "and 14, rue de l'Université."

Then she went into the telegraph office.

THE END

A WARNING

Now, to you whom this tale will with perfect reason, startle and shock, a little word.

I, who recount, do not approve of the tale any more than you do. I see the heroine as you see her, and in the interest of humanity could wish her different.

But in the interests of light literature I am glad that the story happened, for it is all true, and what is true is Life, and what is Life must interest even if it shocks.

So here is an honest warning to those readers who do not wish to see the ugly side of things, who prefer idealism to verity and who "see no use in writing about horrid people."

Having said which, I begin my tale.

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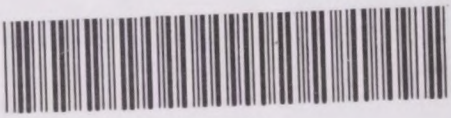

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